

# MARY JANE'S COUNTRY HOME



CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

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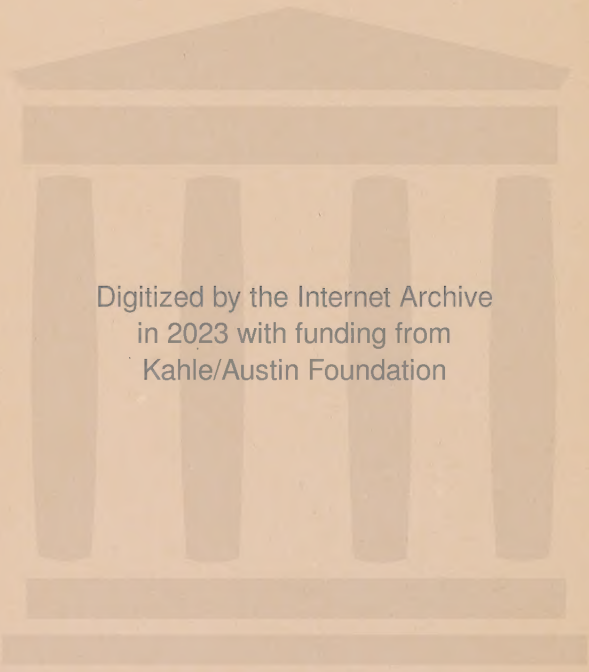








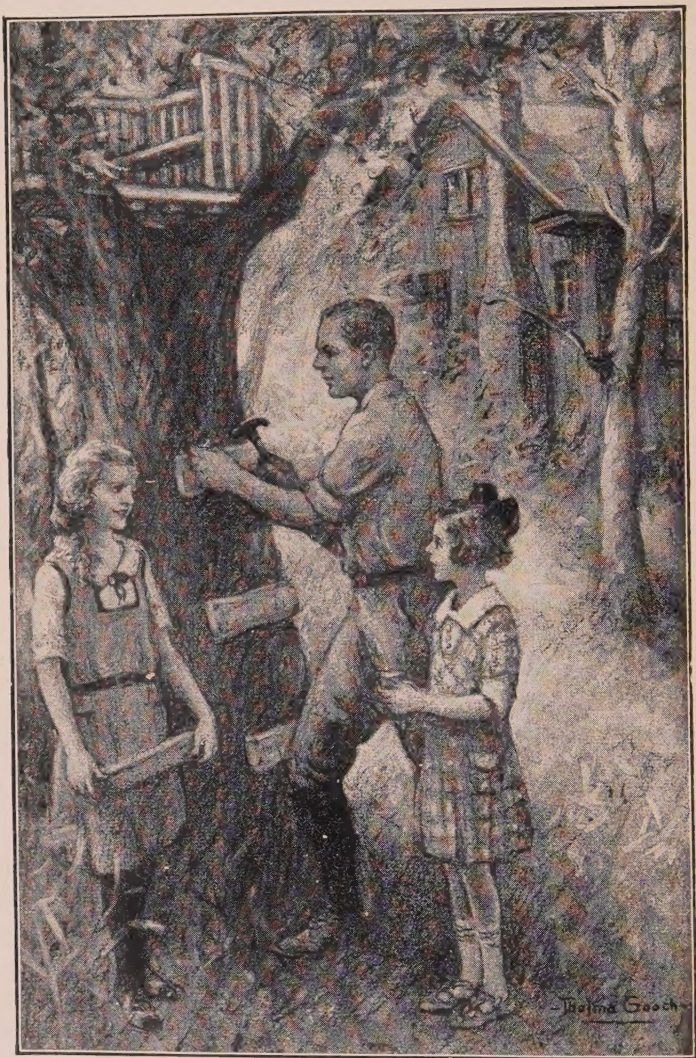




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Hal nailed some boards across the tree trunk,  
so a person could climb right up. (See Page 195)



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# MARY JANE'S COUNTRY HOME

BY  
CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

"MARY JANE—HER BOOK," "MARY JANE—HER VISIT," "MARY  
JANE'S KINDERGARTEN," "MARY JANE DOWN SOUTH,"  
"MARY JANE'S CITY HOME."

*ILLUSTRATED BY  
THELMA GOOCH*

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Mary Jane's Country Home



To  
OUR OWN LITTLE BROWN  
HOUSE IN THE WOODS





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# MARY JANE'S COUNTRY HOME

## THE VISIT TO THE SHACK

“**M**AY we take our suitcases and nighties and things and stay all night?” asked Mary Jane eagerly, “I just love to pack things!”

“Then you’ll have to get your fun packing a picnic basket,” laughed Mrs. Merrill, “for not a suitcase or a nighty goes on this trip. Where do you think you would sleep, child? On the scaffolding or in the chimney?”

Mary Jane giggled at herself. She knew perfectly well that her father had said that while the roof was on and everything was getting along even faster than might have been expected, still their little shack in the woods was far from being in readiness for

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folks to live in. But she was so very anxious to go, and she so dearly loved packing, that for the minute she really hoped they would stay overnight.

“I might roll off the scaffolding, and the chimney would be crowded, wouldn't it, mother?” she replied gaily, “so I guess I will come back here to sleep one more time.”

“But let's do take plenty to eat, mother,” said Alice, “so we can stay every bit of the day and come home after dark. There'll be lots to do, looking at things and making garden and everything. We may make garden this time, may we not Daddah?”

“To be sure,” answered Mr. Merrill, “that's one reason for going. We can have an early breakfast here and then take lunch and dinner—or perhaps, seeing that we'll be out of doors and hungry early, we might have dinner at noon and then a supper of what's left over just before we start for the city. How would that be?”

"Fine," agreed Alice, "unless it would be better to have two dinners—you know we get awfully hungry out of doors."

"Oh, I'll take plenty," laughed her mother. "How would it be to make a fire—out away from the house? Then we could cook something hot at noon and call that dinner, and have cold things at night, supper fashion."

"Goody Goody!" cried Mary Jane happily, "then we can cook some scrambled eggs—I just love scrambled eggs when they have ashes in them and they don't really taste like eggs at all." Mary Jane wasn't fond of eggs ordinarily.

"Well, I know one thing," interrupted Mr. Merrill, "if certain members of this family don't go to bed pretty quickly, the trip to the country will be all off—I don't intend to take any sleepy-eyed people along with me in the morning—not a bit—not a one!"

A glance at the clock showed the girls that Mr. Merrill was quite right in urging them to

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go to bed—it was fifteen minutes past bed-time already. So with a hurried “good night” they scampered off to their room, and in fifty jiffies they were undressed and sound asleep.

It was only a very few nights since Mary Jane Merrill and her big sister Alice and their mother had returned from their wonderful trip east to see her Uncle Harold graduate from Harvard. Indeed, Mary Jane had hardly yet become used again to staying close in their tiny apartment in Chicago, after the days of gay sightseeing and of good times on the eastern coast. But the few days at home had been busy ones, for clothes must be cleaned and put away in order, all her little girl friends were visited and told of the good times in the East, and then farewell playtimes enjoyed with many little friends who were going away for the summer.

Indeed, if Mary Jane hadn't guessed what a good time she and Alice would have that



very summer, she might have been very forlorn indeed when she saw one after another of her good friends go away—east, west and north, anywhere they could find woods and lakes and good times. But as it was, Mary Jane didn't worry a minute! Didn't she have the fun of thinking about the comfortable little shack her father was having built in the woods near a western suburb? And didn't she know that just the very minute the screens were on and the plumbing ready for use, she and her sister and father and mother would also be saying good-by to Chicago for the summer and going out into the open air to have good times and keep strong and well? Of course! No little girl going on seven could forget those jolly plans even for a minute!

So with making furniture lists and grocery lists, and straightening up the things they had taken East, the days flew by till Friday night, the very Friday night when Mr. Merrill hurried his two girls to bed so hastily, came

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around. All day the girls had been helping their mother make plans for Saturday. They had roasted a ham, and baked some white bread and brown bread—their favorite kind, with raisins; they had made salad dressing and cake and set down a jar of pickles and a glass of jelly. Every thing a person could possibly think of was done, and the goodies were all ready in the pantry or cake-box, ready just for a last minute packing in the morning. For Mr. Merrill had promised to give the whole day Saturday to his family, and they were to take the first train, which went at six-fifty, and spend the day picnicking at the new home. To be sure, screens weren't in yet and they might have to borrow a pitcher of water from a neighbor, but all the same there would be plenty of fun—and work too, for Mr. Merrill meant to plant more garden and to start clearing up the grounds, so there would not be too much to do when they finally moved out there.

It was lots of fun to get up so early in the morning. Mary Jane was all through her breakfast, dishes washed and put away, and every bit that was her job done at quarter before six—that was the earliest she had ever been up! And it was still more fun to ride down town when everything was so quiet. They caught the very first express on the elevated, and made record-breaking time to the loop. The stops at stations along the way were brief as there were few folks wanting to get on or off so early. And then the loop! That busy center of Chicago life, called the loop because lines of elevated track entirely surround the part occupied by retail stores and business offices, forming a loop of track, usually was a place of noise and stir and activity. But this early morning, when the four Merrills arrived at the foot of the elevated stairs at Madison and Wabash, the downtown looked very unnatural. Between Wabash and State streets there wasn't an

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automobile—not one. At the corner of State and Madison, called the world's busiest corner, there was nothing but bareness and space—no need of a traffic officer at that hour, there was no traffic!

There was plenty of time to make the train, so the Merrills loitered along looking at shop windows; then they took a car at Madison and State streets and rode west to the beautiful big station where they found their train awaiting them.

It was lots of fun to ride west. The train took them through a network of tracks—Mary Jane couldn't for the life of her see how the engineer could tell which track his train should ride on, there were so many! Then they went past factories—so many factories that she tried to count them but that was impossible; and finally they began coming to pretty little suburbs where homelike looking houses and well-kept lawns and blooming flower-beds were close enough to be seen from the train,



and where trees made the streets look like shady bypaths.

And then the open country, with fields of corn and wheat and oats and farm-houses with pigs and cows and chickens; then a beautiful patch of woods where gay spring flowers still bloomed in the sunshine, and then a pretty little station where the train came to a stop and Mr. Merrill said, "Well, Pussy, don't you know home when you see it?"

Mary Jane was thrilled. She had become so used to thinking of Chicago, great, big, noisy, dirty, interesting Chicago being her home, that she simply couldn't realize that, just because her father and mother had bought a lot and were building a summer-house in this pretty spot, the woods too, were her home.

The Merrills climbed into a waiting jitney, a rattle-trap automobile, and in just three minutes found themselves at a corner where the pavement ended and the woods began. It was now a little after eight, and the sound of ham-

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mers told the girls that their house was right ahead about two stones' throw, and that the carpenters were already hard at work just as father had predicted.

"I'm going to see my house!" cried Mary Jane happily, as she started down the winding path from the road. "I'm going to see my dear woods house." And away she went with Alice at her heels.

Of course the girls had seen pictures of the house before; not really truly pictures to be sure, for there had been no house to take pictures of; but drawings which showed them, as well as the carpenters, just how the house was to look. Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had planned it all themselves and had made careful drawings. But even though they expected to see something pretty and to be pleased, the girls hadn't dreamed of seeing anything half as attractive as what now, through the trees, appeared before them.

A story-and-a-half house of rough, unfin-

ished boards, stained a dark brown, seemed to fit right in with the trees as though it had always been there. In front was a great porch to which the men were fitting screens, and the eaves were broad and sheltering, promising freedom from rainstorms and looking very inviting.

“It’s just like Aladdin and his lamp!” exclaimed Mary Jane in wonder, “there isn’t anything—and then, next time, there’s a beautiful house almost ready for folks to start living in.”

“And two charming princesses ready to live in it,” added Mrs. Merrill, as she came up behind the girls. “Oh, my dears! Isn’t it going to be *fun!*”

From that minute everything went beautifully. The basket and box of food was left in the living-room in a safe corner. Mr. Merrill changed his city clothes for khaki things suited to garden work, Mrs. Merrill and the girls changed, too, so they wouldn’t have to

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be careful of their traveling things, and everybody began to get acquainted.

Mary Jane made friends with the head carpenter, Tom. He showed her how to put up screens, how such prickly wire could be cut, and how a screen frame, just a little too big, was shaved down, oh, so carefully, till it exactly fit.

"There's no use having a screen," he told her, "unless it *fits*. Skeeters are sure to find a crack. And goodness knows, you'll have enough skeeters in these woods." It was plain to see that he couldn't understand why folks should hunt a place way off in the woods to make themselves a home. "Too far from the movies, I think," he admitted. And how he did laugh when Mary Jane told him she liked birds and flowers better than all the movies!

While Mary Jane was busy learning about carpentering, Alice had followed her father into the garden. Mr. Merrill had had a patch of ground plowed and harrowed earlier in the



season, and had put in some seeds and plants so something would be started. But on his flying visits there had not been time to do a quarter of what he had planned.

“We’ll just have to do the best we can this year,” he assured Alice, “but you just see the garden we’ll have next year!”

But by the time he and Alice had worked three hours, he was ready to admit that they would have a pretty good garden even this year. Alice, using the light cultivator, had cultivated around the beans, the tomatoes, the cucumbers and the cabbages. Her father had cultivated the early corn and squash and lettuce, and he had the seed trenches all ready for planting the second crop of corn and beans. Alice thought it was fun to drop the seed in the trench, watching carefully that no two seeds were too near together to grow well, and keeping each seed right in a straight line under the string which Mr. Merrill had stretched to mark where the trench should

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go. Then, when she reached the end of the row, she made a neat little sign post by thrusting a straight twig through the seed envelope so that it could be stuck upright at the end of the row. She felt like a real gardener when her father let her do a whole row by herself. When she reached the end she stuck the seed sign in with a little extra flourish for luck.

“I’d like to show that to Mary Jane and mother,” she said as she proudly surveyed her work. It was the very first grown up garden work she had ever done and no wonder she wanted folks to see it!

“Wonder what Mary Jane and mother are doing?” she thought, remembering for the first time that the sun was getting higher and higher in the heavens, and that the hurried breakfast she ate happened a long time ago.

What *had* Mary Jane and her mother been doing? A call from the edge of the creek, west of the house, made Alice and her father look

that way. And such a welcome sight met their eyes! Without saying a word other than a whoop of joy, garden tools, seeds and everything were tossed aside, and the hungry pair raced over to the creek! Whatever Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane had found to do was evidently desirable, that was sure.

## PICNICKING IN THE WOODS

ALL the time that Mr. Merrill and Alice had been working so faithfully in the garden, Mary Jane and her mother had not been loafing, indeed no! To be sure, Mary Jane spent some time visiting with Tom, and Mrs. Merrill spent a happy half-hour wandering over the tiny house. But that was first thing. Since then they had been busy as could be at the jolliest sort of fun.

First they studied the space that in the plans for the shack had been marked "pantry." Mrs. Merrill talked with Tom and planned just how many shelves there should be; how high the first one should be from the floor, and how wide she wanted them. Then into the tiny kitchen they went, and planned for that. Tom was setting up a chest of drawers which would be useful for small uten-

sils, linens, tea towels and such things, and Mrs. Merrill told him she meant to put the gas hot-plate on the top.

There wasn't much room in the kitchen just then, for the plumber was setting up the laundry-tubs—Mrs. Merrill had planned for two, so that washing could be done right there; and he was hurrying to get through by twelve. But Mrs. Merrill managed to slip in enough to show Tom how she wanted a table-top made to fit over the tubs.

“Don't bother to fix it *too* carefully,” she reminded, “for this is just a summer house, and I shall expect to have a white oilcloth instead of an enamel top on my kitchen table.”

Mary Jane couldn't wedge herself into the kitchen, it was that crowded, but she did manage to find a nail keg to stand on, so that she could look on, even if she couldn't go in. She thought such planning most exciting. And to think it was in *her* house! Mary Jane had never “built a house” before.

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But along about half-past ten, she began to recall that breakfast was all over and finished before a quarter before six, and that nobody had so much as mentioned food since. Houses and shelves and carpenters and such are very interesting, but mealtime does come around all the same.

"Don't you think it's about two o'clock, mother?" asked Mary Jane.

"No, I can't say that I do," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "for carpenters stop work promptly at twelve. But I do think it's time you and I got to work about dinner, if that's any comfort to a little girl about your size."

It certainly was, and it was still more comfort to see her mother roll up her tapeline with which she had been measuring windows for cheese-cloth curtains and unpack her kitchen apron.

"It's only half-past ten," she announced after a glance at her watch, "but none of us ate much this morning, we were so excited, and



these woods certainly make a person hungry. I think by the time we unpack the baskets, make a fire out in the yard and get things ready, those folks out in the garden will be ready to eat."

"But where will we unpack them?" asked Mary Jane, as she looked with dismay from the baskets to the living-room floor, cluttered all over with shavings, nails and bits of wood. "There isn't any place in such a *new new* house."

"You just wait and you'll see a place," laughed Mrs. Merrill, for while she had been working around and measuring, she had planned for this very thing.

"See that old broom out there?" she asked, pointing toward the porch. "You get that, dear, and gather up all the rubbish, the shavings and scraps of wood in this end of the room. Don't try to sweep it, just gather it up without a bit of dust.

"Then, while you're doing that," continued

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Mrs. Merrill, "I'll fix these on these—so—!" While she was talking she went from porch to living-room and back, bringing with her each time one of those curious things called a carpenter's "horse." She set the two in the living-room, about four feet apart. Then, from the kitchen she brought two clean white boards, the kind Tom was using for shelves. They were pretty heavy, but with Mary Jane's help in steadying them at just the right minute, she managed to put them across the "horses" and—presto!—there was a clean, white table, just the right size and height for unpacking baskets.

"I told you it was a regular Aladdin house, mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane gaily. "Now I'm going to clap my hands and see if dinner doesn't come just so quickly."

"It will come quicker if you set that basket up here and unpack it with your two hands, instead of clapping them," said Mrs. Merrill. "But it does seem jolly fun to fix things, in-

stead of having everything just like it always has been, doesn't it, dear?"

"Now, where's my sharp knife for slicing the ham?" asked Mrs. Merrill, as she began unpacking the biggest basket. "Do you suppose we forgot that?"

"No we didn't," replied Mary Jane, "'cause I put it in myself—and there it is!"

"Aren't you glad you bothered to cut up all those cooked potatoes for me yesterday?" asked Mrs. Merrill as she unpacked a bowlful of beautifully diced potatoes, "because now they are all ready to cook."

"But, mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane in dismay, "we haven't made any fire yet! We can't have dinner without a fire!"

"Don't worry, dear," answered her mother. "I thought we'd unpack the baskets, slice the ham, and get every single thing ready in here first. Then we can cover things over so flies won't draw to them and go out and make our fire without a worry. Then as soon as the fire

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is ready, the food is ready too, all but bringing out."

Mary Jane knew just what to do to help, because she had been to many a picnic in the park in the last year, and she always liked to help pack and unpack baskets. So she got out the paper plates, napkins and cups; sorted the "silver"—which wasn't really silver at all but picnic knives, forks and spoons, though Mary Jane called it "silver" just as at home—and laid one of each on each plate.

Tom heard the clatter of utensils and came to the porch door to see what was going on.

"Oh, if it's dinner you're having," he said cordially, "you will be wanting water. Better tell that plumber and he'll let you draw a jarful before he goes for the day."

Mrs. Merrill was very glad of that suggestion, for it saved them the trip to a neighbor's which they had planned to make. She unpacked the glass jar they always carried and the plumber obligingly filled it for her at once,

and also a little tin bucket which would be plenty for coffee for Mr. Merrill and her.

“There now,” said Mary Jane, ten minutes later as she looked over the work both had been doing. “The meat’s cut, the rolls are spread, brown bread’s ready, jelly’s open, pickles open, salad ready, knives, forks, spoons, everything—now aren’t we all finished, mother?”

Mrs. Merrill gave a thoughtful last look over their preparations before she said, “Yes, I do believe we are, Mary Jane. You certainly are good help. Now for our fire!”

“Let’s be real quiet,” suggested Mary Jane in a whisper, “and surprise Daddah and Alice.”

Mrs. Merrill laughed at the whisper. “It’s easy to see you’ve been living in an apartment,” she said, “for you expect everybody to hear. Those folks are way out there in the garden and so busy it will take a lot of calling

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to make them look. And anyway, we're going to make the fire around on the west side of the house, and the shrubbery is so thick over there they couldn't see us if they wanted to—we're perfectly safe."

Mary Jane had never made a fire in the woods before. To be sure, since coming to Chicago, she had many a time been to a beach party and had had the fun of hunting drift-wood and making a fire in the sand. But that was very different. For one thing, a person could make a fire anywhere in the sand, while here on their own ground in the woods they wanted to be careful not to burn up any wild flowers or spoil any greenness.

After a careful search a bare spot was found, close up near the edge of a tiny, tiny bluff by the edge of the creek. Mary Jane gathered dried leaves left over from fall and piled them neatly together. Mrs. Merrill collected twigs and a few larger sticks which she broke into short lengths, and a half-dozen



larger chunks of dead wood. Then the fire was started.

It was fun to sit beside it and watch the orange-colored flames lick up the leaves in a flash; and still more fun to guess just the right minute to add another stick and still another. In five minutes a hot fire was blazing; in a few more minutes a bed of hot coals was ready and Mrs. Merrill set on the frying pan with its butter and meat fat all ready for browning the potatoes.

"Now then, Mary Jane," she said, quickly "call your father and Alice. And while they tidy up, you bring out the plates and everything else you can carry."

Without waiting a second, Mary Jane put her hands to her mouth and shouted.

Alice had been working way down the garden, but at that minute she was up at the end nearest the house and at the only place where she could see where the fire was. She gave one look—and then, dropping tools and every-

thing she ran toward the fire. The steaming frying-pan, the glowing coals and the delicious odor, told her more plainly than words that dinner was about ready to eat.

"Oh, *yum!*" she exclaimed happily, as she threw herself on the grass near the fire, "doesn't it smell *good* and isn't it all *jolly*? And may I have something to eat this very minute?"

"*Almost* this very minute," replied Mrs. Merrill, "for I know you must be nearly starved. Mary Jane has a towel ready for you. Run there to the creek and wash your hands and I'll serve your plate so you'll lose no time."

Such a dinner as it was, and how good everything did taste! It was a lucky thing Mrs. Merrill planned for hungry folks, for each person had three helpings, and cake and fruit besides—woods and work surely do make folks hungry.

After dinner each person tossed plate and



Such a dinner as it was, and how good everything did taste.



napkin into the fire. Mary Jane gathered up the knives and forks. There was no need to worry about washing them, as mother brought some extra ones for supper. Then Mr. Merrill lighted his funny old pipe and they all sat there under the great oak trees, watching the birds, planning the fun they would have when they really truly lived out there, and getting rested and refreshed for the afternoon.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when they finally got ready to go back to the city. The garden was all made, cultivated and weeded. Much of the carpenters' rubbish was gathered up by two busy girls and dumped into a box for kindling. Windows, doorways and shelves were all measured, and plans for coverings and rugs jotted down in Mrs. Merrill's notebook. And best of all, the Merrills felt a homey feeling as though they really belonged to the place they already loved so well.

"Next time we come," announced Mary

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Jane as they drove down to the pretty station, "I hope we don't have to go away so soon. I want to stay and sleep in the woods, they're my very own woods."

And her father thought it perfectly certain that the next time they came out, they really could come to stay.



## FURNISHING THE HOUSE

“**B**UT you haven’t an idea,” exclaimed Mrs. Merrill, “how much there is to do!”

It was the next Monday morning, and Mr. Merrill had just gone to work. Mrs. Merrill and the two girls were sitting at the table, taking it a bit slowly as they did sometimes on a vacation morning. Alice had been talking about going to the country and how she wished they could go that very same day.

“I ’spect there is, mother,” she admitted as her mother exclaimed about how much there was to do before the house would be finished as they hoped to have it, “but you forget school is over now and you have two able-bodied girls ready to help. Now tell us what there is to do.”

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"That's a fair question," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "we'll make a list."

Mary Jane ran to her mother's desk, got a pad of paper and a pencil, and laid them on the table.

"But aren't we lazy, though," laughed Mrs. Merrill, as she glanced at the breakfast table before them.

"Not a bit," retorted Alice promptly. "You always say planning first saves work. Now we're only practicing what you preach, mother dear. We'll plan and then you'll just see how quickly dishes will get themselves done when once we tackle them!"

"All right, dear," said Mrs. Merrill, it sounds like good sense—let's plan.

"There's furniture to buy—I meant to get that weeks ago, but with going east and everything I haven't had a minute."

"But that wouldn't be hard," suggested Alice, "because you said you were going to get old hickory, and all you have to do is make

out a list of what you want and go and buy it.”

“I do believe you are right, dear,” admitted Mrs. Merrill thoughtfully. “That stuff is inexpensive, one price and easy to pick out. I think we could buy all we need in an hour. Then simple iron cots, like army cots, and good mattresses—we do want to be comfortable. I think eight will be enough, if we get a good swing for the porch. We mustn’t have more company than that anyway. Then a small set of dishes, a few necessary utensils, Japanese napkins and runners; a bolt of blue, that lovely soft blue, cheese-cloth for curtains, and some cheap sheets. We’ll take our good blankets with us.”

“That doesn’t sound like much to get,” said Mary Jane, blissfully ignorant of how much work such a list might mean. “Can’t we do it to-day? You know Tom said we could move in the last of this week surely and maybe before.”

Mrs. Merrill stared at her daughter and

then at the list before her. Alice didn't say a word—she knew her mother was thinking hard.

“Let's do it, girls!” announced Mrs. Merrill.

“Hooray, mother!” agreed Alice, “but what is it we do?”

“Let's go down town this morning, this very morning,” repeated Mrs. Merrill as though to reassure herself, “and let's buy everything we need. Then we can order it sent out about Thursday or Friday. To-morrow we can make curtains—I know you girls can help a lot with that; and Wednesday we'll pack, and Thursday——”

“Thursday we'll go to the country!” exclaimed Mary Jane happily, “Oh, goody!”

She was so excited that she jumped up from the table and started rushing dishes to the kitchen sink. The cup danced around on the saucer as though it was dancing a Highland fling, but finally settled down without getting

broken, which was a lucky thing, goodness knows! Broken dishes wouldn't have helped a lot right then!

"I'll clear the table," said Mary Jane, somewhat sobered by the narrow escape of her favorite cup, but still much excited, "and I'll do the dishes, and then we'll go in a hurry."

"I'll tell you a better way yet," said Alice, "we'll all clear the table, for two trips for each of us will do the work. Then you start washing and I'll put away food."

"And I'll do the bathroom and my room, while Mary Jane does the dishes, and Alice tidies your room," added Mrs. Merrill.

"And in one hour we'll be on our way to the train," predicted Alice.

It seemed impossible. One hour for morning work, dressing for downtown and tidying the house! But there's no guessing what those folks can do when everyone works her best, for in exactly fifty-nine minutes, Alice kept track by her watch which was always right,

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Mrs. Merrill locked the door and the three of them started for the train.

"I feel as though some fairy had stood up my clothes and shoved me into them," laughed Mary Jane, as she settled her best hat more comfortably on her head and looked to see if by any chance the ribs of her white stockings ran straight up and down as they should.

Good luck seemed to smile upon them, for an express rolled into the station just as the Merrills reached the platform, and in exactly fifteen minutes they were downtown. It was lots of fun to go up in the elevator of the great store where their purchases were to be made, and to get off at the very interesting section where "summer furniture" was displayed. Mary Jane was fascinated by the many gay sorts of chairs, settees, summer-houses and swings, and really played Goldilocks of the "Three Bears" story the way she sat in one chair after another till she found one that was "just right" for her comfort.



Alice and Mrs. Merrill, with the help of an obliging salesman, looked over all the big display of old hickory furniture, and found it just what they wanted. They picked out two rockers, two large, comfortable straight chairs, several smaller chairs that would not take up a lot of room while in use, a great big table, a cunning little round table, and a settee to put near the fireplace.

After that was done, it took very little time to buy cots and mattresses, which was lucky, as Mary Jane didn't think they were nearly as much fun as chairs and tables. But dishes were jolly to look at, especially as Mrs. Merrill let Mary Jane choose a set with a charming blue pattern for the woods home. Then pans and knives and kettles and a coffee-pot and tea-kettle—it was surprising how quickly the work went when they knew exactly what they wanted to buy, where to buy it, and what it ought to cost.

“There now,” said Mrs. Merrill, “that’s

every single thing but the cheese-cloth for the curtains. Let's get lunch first before we go to the basement for that."

"Oh, let's call Daddah and have him eat with us," suggested Alice. "We can just catch him if we are lucky, for it's five minutes to twelve."

They certainly were lucky, for Mr. Merrill was just going out of the office door when the 'phone called him back to his desk. He was delighted to have company for lunch and in ten minutes had met his family, and together they had found a table near the pretty fountain in one of Chicago's most popular restaurant rooms.

"I'm going to have stuffed chicken legs," announced Alice as she picked up a menu. "I think they're the best ever."

"I'm going to learn to read great big words," said Mary Jane, "so I can hunt up good things too."

"Good work!" approved Mr. Merrill,

“but till you do, how would you like me to read the menu to you?”

Mary Jane beamed at him so happily that he began with “Individual chicken pies” and read all the way down the page. At the end Mary Jane looked thoughtful for a minute and then announced that she would have “Stuffed Chicken Legs and Hashed Brown Potatoes.”

“Now what’s the good of reading a menu to you, young lady?” laughed her father. “You just take what you perfectly well know you’re going to anyway.”

“Yes, Daddah,” admitted Mary Jane, “but you see when I know everything that’s down, then I am perfectly sure, perfectly *certain* sure that there is nothing I’d rather have. And that’s a nice feeling,” she added as the waitress departed with their order.

The luncheon which began with stuffed chicken legs and ended with ice cream and tiny cakes, was quite a success, and Mr. Merrill was

delighted to learn that the shopping had gone so well.

“Better get your curtains before you go home,” he advised as he left them, “and make them to-morrow if you want curtains done, for I have a surprise for you to-night—a real surprise.” And then without giving them even a chance for a question or a guess, he hurried off and was lost in the crowd.

“Now what do you suppose he meant by that?” demanded Alice as she gazed after her father. “Are we going away somewhere?”

“I don’t think so,” said Mrs. Merrill, “but maybe——”

She never finished her sentence, for right there in front of them appeared Uncle Hal, in the city for the day on business, and delighted at the good luck of seeing his nieces.

“Come on and take me a boat ride up to Lincoln Park,” he invited them. “I haven’t

seen Lincoln Park for an age, and as for riding on boats—I haven't been on one since the swan boats in Boston, have I?"

"But I *must* get my blue cheese-cloth," insisted his sister, smilingly.

"Run on and get all the cheese-cloth you want, so long as you leave Mary Jane and Alice to look after me. We'll go up to the fourth floor and buy something. What have you been doing all day?—buying junk for the new summer house?"

Of course that gave them a chance to tell him all about the old hickory furniture and everything, and he was just as interested as they hoped he would be.

"And you're going to be the very first person in there," announced Mary Jane. "The very first person to come to see us."

"If you love me that much," suggested Uncle Hal, "perhaps you'll let me own something in the house. Now let's see what you haven't bought—you have all the regular

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things—how about lanterns? I've heard they have some dandy lanterns up here."

"I'm sure they must have!" Alice assured him happily, "because they have most everything. Mary Jane and I just love to look around up there, Uncle Hal, even if we don't buy lanterns."

"And maybe we'll have time to look at new style doll clothes," suggested Mary Jane tactfully, "and maybe to look at party things and maybe to look at paper dolls and maybe——"

"Hold on here a minute," interrupted Hal laughingly, "are we going to do store sight-seeing? Or are we buying stuff for the new house?"

"We're buying stuff for the new house," said Mary Jane; "only if we happen to pass by these other things—and if they happen to be right there handy, why, then,——"

"Then we'll have to look at them," Uncle Hal assured her.



So they got off the elevator at the fourth floor and began slowly going along the aisle. Uncle Hal very kindly didn't ask where the lanterns were till they had gone quite a way. And as they had gone in the wrong direction, as it proved, they had to go all the way back. So there was time to see and admire a lot before the lanterns were discovered.

"I think maybe we'd better get to those lanterns pretty soon," Alice finally suggested, "because mother'll be looking for us. And maybe there'll be so many lanterns we'll need a lot of time to see them all!"

And sure enough! beautiful lanterns were there by the dozen. Uncle Hal, aided and advised by Alice, bought four lovely ones of just the right shades to look well with dull blue curtains. Just as the order was given, Mrs. Merrill came along the aisle looking for her girls, and she was as pleased and surprised with his purchases as Hal had hoped she would be.

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“Now for a bus to the boat,” said Hal, and off they went feeling very gay, and never for one minute guessing what would happen that same afternoon.

## MOVING IN

“LET me pay the conductor, Uncle Hal,” suggested Mary Jane, as they climbed up the winding back stairs of the boulevard bus, “I just love to drop the dimes and hear the bell ring!” So her uncle gave her four shining dimes which she held tightly in her hand. The bus started up with a jerk and lumbered north on Michigan Boulevard, passed the rows of stores and offices, over the beautiful bridge and on to the distant park.

Finally, just when Mary Jane thought he never would arrive, the conductor came around, and Mary Jane dropped her four dimes, one at a time, into his little cash register where each one as it fell rang a tiny bell.

“And here’s where we get off!” said Hal, as the last bell echoed.

"Oh, not yet!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "why we've only got on!"

"But if we want to go down to the Municipal Pier and get aboard a boat we have to get off here," insisted Hal.

"Then let's not go on the boat to-day," announced Mary Jane, "we'll go on a boat another day. I've just paid ten cents and I don't want to get off the very first minute before I've had my ride," objected Mary Jane.

"That suits me," said Mrs. Merrill, "after running around a store all morning, I'm sure we'll be quite as well off riding *along* the lake as *on* the lake, and it will save the trouble of changing. And anyway, this is so beautiful!"

Mary Jane looked where her mother pointed with a wave of her hand. They were just turning from the drive into Lincoln Park. The lake gleamed blue and smiling over at the right, straight ahead, and on all sides the green of the park looked cool and beautiful, and the dozens of folks who were having a good time

walking, riding or playing, made a person feel comfortable and happy.

“It’s so—” began Mary Jane, but the sentence was never finished.

Something had happened, for at that minute the horn at the front of the bus gave a mad groan and the bus turned sharply into the nearest tree. Mary Jane and all the other passengers on the top had a hard jolt, and were only saved from being tossed overboard onto the grass by clutching quickly and firmly to the hand-rail.

“What in the world!” exclaimed Mrs. Merrill desperately, as she grabbed her two girls. But no one heard her, for each person was, for a second, too dazed by the sudden jolt to pay attention to any one. Then everyone began talking and asking questions at once, and there was a hasty scramble for the stairs and safety.

But no one needed to worry, for nothing serious had happened, though only the quick action of the bus driver had saved an accident.

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A little boy had been playing ball with a group of children by the side of the driveway. Suddenly and without a thought of the terrible danger, he ran out into the driveway for his ball, just as the bus on which Mary Jane was riding came hurrying along. But for the quick work of the driver, who turned his bus in time, there's no telling how serious an accident might have happened. As it was, nothing worse than a shaking up for the passengers and a damaged radiator for the bus had resulted.

"All the same, that spoils our ride, on *that* bus anyway, for we don't want to wait for repairs," said Uncle Hal, "we'll get another."

They went to the side of the driveway, ready to hail the next bus, when who should drive up to them but their neighbor, Mr. Holden, who they thought was way up in Wisconsin with his family. And such luck, Betty in the back seat!

"Thought we saw passengers in distress,"



he laughed, "hop in and we'll take you home."

"But where'd you come from?" asked Alice, a little dazed to have things happen so fast.

"Wisconsin, fair lady," replied Mr. Holden seriously. "Business. My daughter," and he waved a hand at six-year-old Betty in such a dignified fashion that Mary Jane couldn't help giggling, "is visiting her aunt for a few days, and I make the journey out to West Chicago Thursday, to pick her up. Sorry you can't drive there with me then, but how would you get home?"

"We wouldn't," replied Alice quickly, "we'd stay in the country where you could leave us on the way. Oh, Mr. Holden, our house is most done and we're going out Thursday to live, and we can sleep out of doors and have flower beds—and everything!"

"Hooray for everything!" laughed Mr. Holden, "but climb in and let's go."

So that was how it happened that the Merrills not only had the treat of a ride home

from the north side, but also were driven to their country home on Thursday morning.

Tuesday and Wednesday were busy days. There were cheese-cloth curtains to make for all the windows and for the French doors at the end of the living-room in the shack; there were trunks to pack, the house to put in perfect order under dust covers for its long summer sleep; there were grocery lists to finish, grips to pack and a hundred-and-one small jobs to think of and attend to. But with three willing folks to work, things got done as by magic, so that when Mr. Holden honked his horn at six-thirty on Thursday morning, the Merrills were ready to leave.

Mr. Merrill had to go to the office first, but he promised to be out in the early afternoon.

"And we'll just have everything so *done* when he comes," announced Mary Jane, as she climbed into the car, "that he won't know the place."

But as a matter of fact, it was Mary Jane

herself who hardly "knew the place" when she raced down from the corner where Mr. Holden had left them. Instead of three carpenters who were working there on Saturday, there were seven, and such a noise and racket and bustle you never heard! Two were finishing the screens on the porch; two were screening a great sleeping-porch upstairs; two were finishing the stairway which wasn't even started on Saturday (Mary Jane had had to climb a ladder to get upstairs), and the seventh was testing locks and hinges to make sure that everything was in perfect order.

"We're trying to get out of your way to-day, Mrs. Merrill," the head man said, "and I almost think we can make it."

"Then if our things come, the food and beds and dishes and everything we have ordered," replied Mrs. Merrill, "we can stay to-night as we had hoped."

"You can do that anyway," the workman assured her, "for any little odd jobs we can't

finish can be done later without bothering you a lot. And the plumber is through except for some adjustment of the tubs which he promised to do this afternoon."

"Then we can live here," cried Mary Jane happily, "and hang up our things and unpack! Come on, Alice, let's pick out which side of the closet is yours and which is mine, so we can unpack our bag."

They didn't have to change dresses, for Mrs. Merrill had let them wear plain little gingham dresses for the drive out, so they could get right to work. And a good thing that was too, as there was lots to do.

Mary Jane had no more than hung up her coat and hat, unpacked her share of the suitcase and taken a peep out of doors into the woods, when a man came down the path in front asking, "Is there a party named Merrill around here?"

"We're named Merrill," she replied, "but there isn't any party, we're just moving in."

He grinned good-naturedly and said, "then this is where I leave you some groceries."

In two or three minutes he came back carrying on his strong shoulder a great crate of groceries—fresh green things, canned things, fruit, sugar, flour and a lot of other stuff. It took three trips to get it all over from the wagon, and when he had finished the Merrill's front porch looked like the back-store room of a chain grocery store.

"There now," exclaimed Mrs. Merrill, as she hunted out the list, "I hope that's all. It certainly looks like enough. Now I'll sort over and unpack. Alice, you check this list as I call things off, so we can see that we got everything that we paid for, and, Mary Jane, you may carry things into the pantry, if you will."

"I'd love to," said Mary Jane, poking into the nearest package to see if by any chance it would happen to be something good to eat on the spot. "I know just where to put things, 'cause Alice and I planned it out the other

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day. The third shelf for dishes and glasses 'cause that's handy, and above that for canned things, and under that—what did we call the things that went under that, Alice?"

"Staples," said Alice. "Sugar, you know, honey, and flour, and soap, and everything like that."

"I know," agreed Mary Jane, "only I couldn't think what you call 'em. They're the things that aren't good to eat till somebody's stirred 'em up and baked 'em—all but the soap."

The groceries proved very good and were just getting settled in their proper places, when another man came down the path asking for the Merrills.

"We have a lot of furniture, Madam," he announced, "and I guess we'll have to carry it here piece by piece as there is no road down to the house."

After that Mary Jane lost track of what happened, for there just was so very much to



see and do. The two men brought all the furniture, the chairs and the tables and the beds and the mattresses; and bedding came in the express box sent from home; and dishes arrived in another wagon, till it seemed as though there ought to be nothing left in the big stores in the city.

“It’s a good thing we picked out a place in a suburb,” said Mrs. Merrill, as she stopped a minute in the tiny kitchen to notice that Alice and Mary Jane were washing all the new dishes and putting them away in the pantry. “If we were ’way, ’way out in the country, we’d never get thing’s settled as easily as this—especially when we have no car of our own. I think we’ve done a wise thing to build our shack just where it is.”

“I think we have too,” agreed Mary Jane happily. “Only I wish we had something to eat, I do.”

“You poor, dear child!” exclaimed her mother, “and it’s after twelve and you had

breakfast before six! How the time does fly! I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll hurry and wash my hands and you wash yours. Then we'll make some sandwiches and get some milk and have a lunch. That'll be the quickest. And by evening we'll be so well settled that I can cook you a fine, hot dinner."

They took the bread board and the butter and a jar of jam, one of cheese, and one of sandwich meat out to the built-in table on the porch, and there they had the finest sort of an impromptu feast. Nobody counted the sandwiches eaten, which was a good thing for Mary Jane, and everybody got rested and refreshed for the afternoon's work.

"Now then," said Mrs. Merrill, some time later when a glance around the shack showed her how tidy and homelike everything looked already, with each chair and curtain and rug in its place, "I think it's time to go and meet Daddah."

So Mary Jane, very clean as to hands and

very happy as to heart, raced up the path away from the shack and down the road her father would come on.

The fun in the woods was beginning.

## THE FIRST NIGHT ON THE SLEEPING PORCH

UP TILL the minute that Mrs. Merrill called them to wash up for dinner, every person worked their hardest. For even though things downstairs looked perfectly settled before Mr. Merrill arrived on the scene, beds were still to be made, the swing in the living-room and on the porch had to be hung, and many little details, overlooked at first, turned up.

“But now,” announced Mrs. Merrill as she put dinner on the table, “work is over for the day. We’re going to take our time eating and enjoying the trees and the sunset——”

“And the food, I hope,” interrupted Alice, laughingly, hoping her father would take a hint and serve her quickly.

He did, with Mary Jane only a half a minute behind, and nothing much was said by either

young lady during the next five minutes.

The dining-table was built in at the east corner of the front porch. There were no chairs, but a long built-in bench on each side made plenty of room for three on a side. So with only two on a side, there was room to spare. It was fun to stretch her feet out on the bench, when dinner was over, stick a pillow under her head and look up into the trees. Birds were flying hither and yon finding their nests before the twilight; an aeroplane passed directly over the house, going from the government field at Maywood, Mr. Merrill said; and the distant croaking of frogs in a swamp the other side of the woods all helped Mary Jane to feel tired and sleepy. Perhaps getting up early in the morning and helping as hard as she could all day had *something* to do with it, too.

So it needed little persuading to let her agree to father carrying her upstairs, and mother helping with shoes and things till she

tumbled into her new cot bed and to Slumberland. All this without ever seeing darkness in the woods, or thinking how funny it would be to wake up in the night in a room which wasn't a room at all but an open porch in the trees, where there wasn't a bit of light one could have by turning a switch.

Mary Jane slept soundly. She didn't even turn over when Alice brought her candle up and went to bed, or when Mr. Merrill called from downstairs," Sure you have candles enough and matches, so if we should want anything in the night?"

Mrs. Merrill looked to make sure, but even as she was looking she replied," Why worry about what we will want in the night? I know we'll sleep so soundly we'll never know whether it's night or day!"

And it seemed as though she guessed right, for soon the Merrill family was sound asleep, and darkness and quiet brooded over the little shack home.



Mary Jane hadn't an idea what wakened her. She only knew that suddenly she was wide awake and that something was wrong. A half-moon cast a curious light over the woods. Things that were plain as day when she went to sleep, looked dim and ghostly now. The nearest oak tree, that had seemed like a friend to a sleepy little girl at twilight, looked stern and dark in this pale light. Alice, sleeping so soundly on her right, and her father and mother looking like queer, dim shadows on her left, made no stir. What then, had wakened the little girl?

She sat up in bed and listened, tensely.

There it was again!

A soft, scratch, scratch, scratch at the kitchen door.

Some one was trying to get in their house!

She tried to call her father, but a lump stuck in her throat, and anyway perhaps it was just as well not to call him, for no telling

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what the intruder might do if some one bothered him.

One or two stories she had heard about robbers raced through Mary Jane's head, and she tried to think what she really ought to do. Should she be a brave girl; go downstairs, and ask the robbers to go away? Likely as not that's what a little girl in a story might be supposed to do. But Mary Jane wasn't in a story. She was in bed, in a new, queer room, and that scratch, scratch, scratch, went right on down there at the kitchen door.

In desperation, she raised herself up and whispered to her father, "Daddah! Daddah! *Daddah!*" This last in a tense, frightened whisper that wakened her mother.

"What it is dear?"

"Hush!" whispered Mary Jane softly. "There's somebody trying to get into the kitchen! Call Daddah!" And then she snuggled down under the covers, much relieved to know that her mother was awake.

Mrs. Merrill listened but there wasn't a sound. Perhaps the intruder had caught the sound of Mary Jane's whispers and he, too, was listening.

Off in the trees some one called, "Who-o-o?" mournfully, but there was no other sound.

"I guess you just dreamed something, dear," said Mrs. Merrill, sleepily, and with a friendly pat of her little girl's hand and a touch to see that blankets were well over her, for even in summer one needs blankets in the woods, Mrs. Merrill slipped off to sleep again.

Mary Jane lay still. Could she have dreamed that scratch?

Indeed no. There it was again. That was no dream. It was really true—it was some one at the door downstairs. Setting her teeth tightly, and making herself as brave as brave could be, she crept out of her warm bed and over to her father's cot.

"Daddah! Wake up!" she whispered, shaking him. "There's somebody getting in

downstairs, and mother's gone to sleep again!"

Dazed at the sudden awakening, Mr. Merrill sat up in bed. For a second he couldn't place himself in the unfamiliar surroundings.

Scratch, scratch, scratch on the kitchen door, and Mary Jane's fingers tightened on his arm.

"That's no robber," he said, in a comfortable, daytime voice. "That's a dog. Don't you remember that beautiful big dog that followed me up from the station and took the chop bone you gave him after dinner? Maybe he's come back to see if you have any more bones of that class."

Mary Jane couldn't believe, so, slipping on his night sandals, her father got out of bed, picked her up in his warm arms and carried her over to the end of the porch overlooking the kitchen door. There, plain as possible in the pale moon light, stood the beautiful dog. His front feet on the top step, his head cocked, listening hopefully.

"Tell him you'll see him some other time," suggested Mr. Merrill.

Mary Jane pressed her face against the screen and called, "Doggy! Hello, Doggy!" The dog wagged his tail briskly and barked two sharp, happy barks.

"See, dear," said Mr. Merrill, reassuringly, "he's the very same one. Now tell him to go home."

"Go home! Go home, sir," repeated Mary Jane and, would you believe it? that well-trained dog turned regretfully and slowly wandered off through the woods in the direction of his home.

"Well!" exclaimed Mary Jane, with a deep sigh, "I thought he was a robber, truly I did!" "Where there really is one robber," laughed Mr. Merrill, "about a hundred folks *think* there is one, so I'm not surprised at you, Pussy. But we're pretty safe in these quiet woods, so don't you be worried in the night any more."

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"But who was it calling to me a while ago?" asked Mary Jane, suddenly remembering.

"Calling to you?" asked her father, "so far as I knew, you did the calling."

"Not all," replied Mary Jane, "somebody else wanted to know who was at our door too. I heard 'em ask."

As though to prove her words right, the mournful sound came through the woods again, and at that very minute.

"Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?"

"There it is!" exclaimed Mary Jane, tensely.

"That!" laughed her father comfortably, "that's a hoot owl. Now listen and I'll make him come nearer."

It was a good thing Mary Jane was watching her father closely, otherwise she might have been frightened again. For immediately he imitated the call of the hoot owl so perfectly it almost seemed as though an owl was in the sleeping porch.

“Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?” called Mr. Merrill.

There was silence for a minute, and then the soft flutter of wings. A pause. And from a nearby oak came the owl’s call, “Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?”

“He thinks you’re an owl!” exclaimed Mary Jane, delightedly. “Do it again, Daddah!”

“Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?” called Mr. Merrill, very softly because the owl was so near.

Again there was a pause and then a soft flutter of wings as the owl flew to the oak tree just outside the screen. If Mary Jane’s arm had been two feet longer and if there had been no screen—but of course she couldn’t catch him, he’d fly away.

But he was so near she could see him plainly in the pale moonlight; could see his glistening eyes and the soft fluff of feathers around his head.

“Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?” called Mr. Merrill again.



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Mary Jane waited expectantly.

"It's going to be fun to watch him talk when he is so very close up," she whispered in her father's ear—such a tiny, faint little whisper that the owl couldn't possibly hear a sound of it.

For answer he pressed her hand and they listened tensely.

The owl craned his head this way and that. Looked thoughtfully into the shadow under the eaves and blinked his bright black eyes—eyes that could see very well in this dim light, but which couldn't see a thing by daylight.

But evidently Mr. Merrill had been too close for a successful imitation this time, for the old owl gave an indignant shake, shake, shake of his fluffy feathers and flew off into the night.

"Well, anyway," said Mary Jane as her father carried her over and tucked her in bed, "there are a lot of interesting folks in the woods, and I guess I've seem them all."

## NIGHT ON SLEEPING PORCH 77

She dropped right off to sleep and slept soundly till the sun was high up in the eastern sky. Then she sat up in bed with a start. Some one was throwing stones, pebbles, on the roof over her head. And the pebbles were rolling down, down, down, over the roof!

## GETTING ACQUAINTED

MARY JANE looked around the sleeping porch. No one in Alice's bed; no one in mother's bed; no one in Daddah's bed; everybody gone. Of course she didn't know that her father had told Mrs. Merrill about how disturbed Mary Jane had been in the night, and had suggested that she be allowed to sleep as late as possible.

A thud on the roof and then again that patter as of falling stones made Mary Jane turn her head quickly—just in time to see a cunning little gray squirrel jump from the edge of the roof to the oak tree and swing himself off to a lower branch.

“Well, of all—” but before Mary Jane could finish even that little sentence, another thump on the roof told her more squirrels were about, and the patter, patter down over the shingles,

said that the second squirrel was chasing after his friend.

Mary Jane settled back on her pillows to watch the fun.

Mr. Second Squirrel raced after Mr. First Squirrel; down to the tree, out on the lower branch, jump (and Mary Jane held her breath) to the nearest tree with the branches swaying as in a wind storm.

It was plain the first squirrel was trying to hide something the second squirrel wanted. Mary Jane wished she knew what. She was just deciding to get up and hunt Alice, who knew a lot more about animals than Mary Jane had learned yet, when her sister called up the stairs.

“Sleepy head! Going to get up to-day? Don’t you hear those squirrels fighting?”

“‘Deed I do,” said Mary Jane’s voice, much more wide-awake than Alice expected to hear it. “What they doing?”

“The gray squirrel, he’s the first one, you

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know, and I've been watching him from the front porch," said Alice, "has a tender root that he's found in the woods over in front. Maybe he's taking it home to a new family. I haven't had time to find his nest, but that's likely as not what the root is for, 'cause baby squirrels like roots. And that horrid red squirrel——"

"The second one?" asked Mary Jane in surprise, "why I thought he was so pretty!"

"He is," admitted Alice. "But pretty is as pretty does. He's a thief. He's too lazy to dig up his own roots, and he's trying to steal Mr. Gray Squirrel's. Maybe Reddy has a family too, but I don't care! He oughtn't to steal, he ought to work.

"Well, they're out of sight now," she added, as she looked carefully through the trees, "so we'll never know how it came out. But you just watch and you'll see the red squirrels always chasing and making trouble. The little gray fellows aren't so pretty and their tails

are awfully scrubby, but they do behave. Now don't you want some breakfast, honey? Mother said just slip into sandals, it's so warm this morning, and you may wear the same things you did yesterday, and then take a shower and dress freshly later. And, oh, Mary Jane, you're going to have such a breakfast! Strawberries! and cheese toast and doughnuts—mother's just making them! Better hurry!"

Mary Jane needed no urging. As soon as her mind was turned away from the squirrels she smelled the fragrant whiff of doughnuts cooking and it didn't take her long to tumble into clothes and get down stairs to eat her share.

After breakfast Mrs. Merrill asked the girls what they would most like to do.

"I'd like to sweep," said Mary Jane.

"Just regular sweep?" asked Mrs. Merrill, in surprise.

"It isn't regular sweep," said Mary Jane, "it's fun sweep. I'd like to sweep the living-

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room with the new broom and gather up the dust on the new dust-pan and all."

"And I'd like to make the beds, if there isn't any hurry about getting them done," said Alice, "because from upstairs I can watch the squirrels so well, and I just love to watch squirrels."

"Then I'll set my bread and tend to things in the kitchen," said Mrs. Merrill, "and then, after all housework is done, we can take a walk and explore around the place. Do you know, I've been so busy inside, I haven't even been to the back fence since we came, or to the garden!"

"But what about the trunk?" asked Alice, "it isn't unpacked yet."

"That needn't bother us," laughed Mrs. Merrill. "Things are here, and if we need them we can find them. We'll unpack that last trunk just as soon as we get to it conveniently, Miss Merrill!"

"If you feel like that," Alice tossed back at



her, "I shall have to hurry up and watch squirrels as hard as I can—and make a bed or two if there's time."

"While I do the living-room," Mary Jane reminded them, "and I don't care how many times I have to sweep it—I just love to sweep rooms!"

She nearly had her wish for, just when the room was finally in apple-pie order, the mason came to fix a forgotten something in the fireplace and the carpenter arrived with a lock that had been overlooked. And of course both workmen made a muss on the floor. But that didn't matter. Mary Jane liked it. She got her broom and dust-pan and cleaned up again. And that time things stayed clean, and at half-past eleven necessary work all done, and the Merrills started to explore their own yard.

When they bought that particular parcel of land, in the early spring, the trees were bare as in winter, and one could look through to the east and south and see long stretches

of wooded country off to the tiny lake. To the west lay the little village with pretty suburban houses along each street. From the Merrills' lot they could easily see five or six places. But now everything looked different. The woods were full of greenness and made almost a wall all around the place. Not a house could be seen anywhere, and if one happened to forget that the village, with its convenient milk-man, grocery-man and friendly folks, was so near, one might have guessed the pretty, little, brown shack was way off up in the northern woods somewhere.

The change in the looks of the lot itself was quite as marked. In the early spring the lot looked small and open in spite of the great tree trunks. Now those tree trunks supported great masses of green. Shrubs too little to be seen in winter were walls of leafy green, and here and there a wild grapevine, clambering over shrubs and tree trunks, made a tight screen through which not even the sharpest eyes could

peep. So it was not possible to see far through the woods, or even all of their own lot, from the house. This, of course, made it all the more fun, because what one cannot easily see is the more fun to explore.

“Let’s look at the creek first,” said Mary Jane, as they started out from the front porch. “I think there are still some buttercups there.”

The creek was in a deep and picturesque gully at the west side of the place. In times of heavy rains it was full to overflowing with water. In a dry season, not a drop of water would roll over the gravelly bed. But water or no water, it was pretty and interesting, and Mary Jane was glad it was there.

“Yes, I know there are buttercups,” Alice assured her, “because I saw a glimpse of yellow yesterday when I went to meet the furniture man. Look! There they are!”

Sure enough! All along the side of the creek bed, tiny yellow buttercups stuck brave

heads up through the leaves. Buttercup season was surely about over, but perhaps the dampness and shade of the great oak trees had made a longer season of bloom than elsewhere. Anyway, there they were, and, more wonderful still, beyond, on the far side of the creek, were a half-dozen bluebells.

"May we pick them?" exclaimed Alice. "Oh, mother! Think of picking wild flowers in our own yard! Isn't it just too lovely?"

"I *am* thinking," said Mrs. Merrill, "only you know, dear, we want the flowers to come up every year. So be very careful when you pick. Don't take more than half the blooms from any one plant. Then the plant won't be spoiled and will grow and bloom for us again. It is really cruel how some folks steal from the woods. Thoughtlessly they grab up flowers in helter fashion only to throw them away when they wilt. Pick only a few, put them right in water, and we will enjoy them even more than if you try to pick every one."

The girls climbed down the steep side of the creek, and began picking. They found that it was just as their mother said, it was more fun to pick slowly and carefully, enjoying each flower, than it was to grab. Alice picked seven buttercups and three bluebells, choosing long stems and arranging them gracefully as she picked them. Mary Jane picked four buttercups, and then what do you suppose she found? Down under the buttercup leaves where they had plenty of shade and dampness, were three beautiful violets, deep blue and lovely. Maybe she wasn't glad she had worked slowly and looked hard! A person walking swiftly by would never have guessed that violets were hidden under those broad leaves!

"Now we'll have to put them in water," said Mary Jane. "Will you wait for us here, mother?"

Mrs. Merrill said she would. So she sat down on the grass while the girls ran into the

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house and, hunting up glasses, gave their flowers a drink.

"Did you ever see anything so pretty on this Japanese table runner?" asked Alice as she placed her glass of flowers on the dining table on the porch.

"Not unless it's mine," replied Mary Jane, as she put her flowers on the little round table in the living-room. "Now let's explore some more."

They hurried back to Mrs. Merrill and together the three continued the interesting walk around the new grounds.

Along the creek they went till it widened into a tiny lake about twelve feet wide and then disappeared down a great drain pipe that carried water off under the garden instead of over it.

"I think that's funny for a creek to run into a pipe, even if it is a *little* creek," laughed Mary Jane as she watched the little trickle of water dribble into the pipe.



“Now let’s see if there are any pansies to pick yet.”

There were; the pansy bed Mr. Merrill had planted with half grown pansies, was full of bloom and looked very gay in the sunshine.

“But let’s not pick till we come back this way,” suggested Mrs. Merrill, “because if you girls are running into the house all the time with flowers, we never will get around before lunch.”

“That suits me,” agreed Alice, “because I’ve been wanting to get way back here and see what kind of chickens those folks next door have. I love to watch chickens.”

Across a grassy space they walked, up a slight rise in the ground and over to the wire fence at the back of a lot. There they stopped in amazement. For instead of the half-dozen chickens they had expected to find, they saw dozens of sturdy hens and roosters and still more dozens of the funniest chicks Mary Jane had ever seen. Some were scraggly and awk-



ward—too old to be pretty and too young to be useful, Mrs. Merrill laughingly explained. Some were tiny and soft and downy, just little lumps of yellow feathers. Mary Jane stood as close to the fence as she could get and watched.

One family in particular interested her. A beautiful white mother hen was proudly strutting along with a whole family of cunning little chicks peeping at her heels. Mary Jane thought she would like nothing better than to have such a family for pets.

“Chicky! Chicky! Chicky!” she called softly. And so closely was she watching those chicks that she didn’t even glance at anything else any more than did her mother or sister.

“Here, Chicky! Chicky!” she repeated.

So she didn’t see any new strange creature around. She didn’t even suspect what was coming.

Right in front of her appeared a great white

something, and an awful voice hissed at her, snake-like and terrifying.

“Hiss-ss-ss! Hiss-ss-ss!”

Mary Jane was so frightened she didn't even scream. She just stood still and looked, round-eyed, and startled.

## A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

FOR two or three seconds Mary Jane stood there staring. It was so unbelievable—this great creature stretching out its long, slim neck and hissing. Of course Mary Jane had never heard a snake hiss—most folks never do. But she seemed to know right off that the sound this creature made was like a snake would make—very horrid and unpleasant, it was at any rate.

Her first thought was to run, but for a second she was too frightened to make her feet take her anywhere. Then, suddenly, she began to laugh—a laugh that was rather shaky to be sure, but a laugh just the same. And it *was* funny, no doubt of that.

Here was a great ten foot fence of strong wire, with Mary Jane, Alice and Mrs. Merrill on one side and all the chickens and ducks and

geese on the other. And there, though goodness knows she was safe enough behind that fence, this big old mother goose was hissing and scolding for fear they would hurt her five little baby geese! And she kept it up too, till Mary Jane got all over being afraid, even when the goose spread out her two great white wings and made a great show of fighting.

“She’s a pretty good bluffer, isn’t she, dear,” laughed Mrs. Merrill, who, of course, was awfully proud that Mary Jane so quickly got over being frightened; “For bluffing is all she does. She wouldn’t do much but hiss and scream and fly at us if the fence wasn’t there. But I must say that usually she is successful. If the fence wasn’t here, I don’t know that I’d like to stand so close and have her fly at me—she doesn’t make a person comfortable.”

Alice ran down to the corner of the chicken yard and tossed something over the fence.

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Instantly every creature in that whole chicken yard ran to get that something. Big ones, little ones, every sort, away they went. And then how the girls did laugh! For what Alice had thrown was nothing more than a handful of long grass!

"But that isn't queer," Mrs. Merrill explained. "Chickens love green stuff and must have it every day. See how every blade of grass is gone from their own yard? You couldn't throw them anything they would like better than grass."

"Then they shall have every blade when Daddah lets me cut the grass," said Alice. "Won't it be fun to watch them scramble for a lot like that?"

The Merrills turned away from the chicken yard to resume their exploring, but when Alice looked at her watch they changed their plans. She discovered it was after twelve and she and her mother had had such an early breakfast no wonder they were hungry! So the rest of

the exploring had to wait—they had done the most interesting part anyway, and they wandered back to the shack for lunch.

After lunch Mary Jane went upstairs to rest awhile and to look at some pictures. She was stretched out on her bed having a happy time all by herself when she heard a knock on the front door.

It was easy to hear, for the sleeping-porch was directly over the front downstairs porch. A strange voice asked, "Is this where a new little girl lives?"

Alice replied, "two new girls live here; I'm one."

Evidently the visitor looked at Alice carefully, for there was a pause and then the voice said, "You're not the one. You're too old. Maybe it's the other one."

"You must mean my sister, Mary Jane," suggested Alice.

"I don't know her name," replied the stranger, "but the carpenter that built this

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house told me that a little girl 'bout my age was going to live here, and mother said I could come and spend the afternoon."

Alice invited her in. Mrs. Merrill left her work and came to the porch to say "How do you do?" and Mary Jane, herself, hurried downstairs to meet her welcome guest.

"I'm Margaret Rodney," the guest was saying as Mary Jane reached the porch, "only nobody ever calls me Margaret. They call me Peggy, and I live in the first house over there." She pointed through the trees toward an attractive gray plaster house the Merrills had admired.

Peggy was a dark-haired little girl of about seven years old. Her hair was straight and bobbed; her dress was a handmade one of orange-colored crepe, very becoming; her play sandals showed she was dressed for a good time; and her pretty socks with colored tops to match her dress showed that some careful



person had known just what to buy for a little girl her age.

She looked at Mary Jane and saw that she was just a little younger than herself; that her wavy brown hair was bobbed; that her soft blue gingham dress was very becoming; that her socks had blue tops not unlike Peggy's own; and that her eyes looked friendly. Both girls stood for a second frankly looking at each other. Then they sat down, awkwardly, on the big couch, and said not a word.

Mrs. Merrill knew that they would get acquainted better if she slipped away; so suggesting to Alice that they finish their work, both went into the house and the two little girls were alone.

"My dog has three puppies," began Peggy.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary Jane, much impressed, as Peggy had hoped she would be, "can I see 'em?"

"Yes," said Peggy, "and I've a kitten—a gray one with a white spot on its nose."

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Mary Jane felt quite forlorn. Should she explain that she had just moved from a city apartment where folks can't have any pets? Or should she say she was going to have some (she did hope she might!). Then she happened to think of the geese.

"We haven't lived here long enough to have anything yet," she admitted, "but we've pretty nearly got a lot of geese. A fighty, hissy lot and they're big, very big."

"Pretty nearly?" asked Peggy, who didn't quite understand.

"I mean they're pretty nearly ours, they're our next-door neighbor's," replied Mary Jane. "Oh, you mean the Barretts' geese," said Peggy wisely, "they're fun. I can just go in that yard and walk straight up to that old mother goose and let 'er hiss. I'm not a bit afraid of her, I'm not."

"Neither am I," admitted Mary Jane, who didn't want to be outdone. "And I'm not

afraid of dogs at night or squirrels on the roof or anything."

"Well, I should say not," agreed Peggy, much surprised to think anyone might even consider being afraid of such familiar things.

"Will your mother let you go out in the woods and play house?" she added.

"I 'spect she will if it isn't far," said Mary Jane. It seemed nice to think of playing with somebody, and she loved to play house more than anything else.

Mrs. Merrill was glad to let her go with Peggy, as Peggy knew her way around so well and promised not to go far, so very gaily the two new friends skipped away.

"We'll go down this path," suggested Peggy, leading the way, "till we come to the big log that's down on the ground. There's a nice bare place there, and you may have one side and I'll have the other and then pretty soon we'll go up to my house and get some dishes."

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But they didn't do that after all. They picked out the place for each girl's house; they cleared the ground and laid down sticks for walls of each room. So far, Mary Jane did just as Peggy did. Then she began to do some thinking of her own.

"We don't need to go up to your house for things," she announced, "we've plenty of things right here. We can use those broad leaves for bed covers and the little twigs will make the beds. We'll play they're 'balsam bough' just like we read in a book. And the acorns can be dishes; I think they're lots better than china dishes for a woods house."

"And we can pile up the cups and saucers and put them in this cupboard," continued Peggy happily, as she began gathering up handfuls of acorns and piling them on the grass in the space she had marked off for the china cupboard.

"And we can make dolls this way," continued Mary Jane, remembering the things



She punched tiny holes for eyes and nose, and  
a slit for the mouth.



she used to love playing before she moved to Chicago. She took up a seven inch stick and tested it carefully to make sure it was not too dry and brittle. Then she took three good-sized maple leaves, and a half a dozen long bits of grass. She punched one leaf in the middle, pulled it down about an inch; gathered the edges in firmly toward the middle of the stick, and tied it firmly with a bit of grass.

“That’s the waist to her dress,” she explained to Peggy, who was anxiously watching operations.

Then she held the other two leaves at the stem ends, tied them tight onto the stick body just where the leaf waist ended. These made the full, frilly skirt.

It wasn’t so easy to find just the right leaf for a face, but finally Mary Jane found one from a nearby ironwood tree. It was oval shaped—not much too long. With a very slender bit of grass she tied it on at the doll’s neck. Then gently, being very careful not to



get the holes too big, she punched tiny holes for eyes and nose and a slit for the mouth.

"Well, that's a good one," said Peggy admiringly, "now I'm going to make one too."

For, of course, it would never in the world do to have only one person in a doll family! There must be father and mother and at least three children. And not only a family of five for Peggy, but one for Mary Jane, too. Fortunately, Mary Jane found some yellowish tinted leaves, so the whole family didn't wear exactly the same color clothes; the girls used the brownish green leaves for the fathers, bright green for the mothers, and yellowish green for the children.

"Wouldn't it be fun to dress dolls in autumn when there'd be all sorts of colors to choose from!" suggested Peggy as she busily pinned a mother doll's frock into place.

"Yes, wouldn't it," agreed Mary Jane, "let's remember to play this lots of times, Peggy."

So busy were the little girls, that they didn't think of time or home or anything, till Alice came along the path and said, "Mother says she's baked some fresh cookies, and if you want some, and some lemonade I've made, better come and get them right now." And of course that's just what the two new house-keepers promptly did.

## THE FALLEN TREE

**W**TH each day that they played together, Peggy and Mary Jane grew to be better friends. They liked to play games like slap jack on the built-in dining-table at the shack; they like to climb around the creek in Mary Jane's yard; but they liked best of all the play house down by the fallen log. Perhaps some folks would have thought it a funny sort of a house to play in—for, truly, it wasn't a house at all! The girls laid sticks on the grass making a design of rooms and that was what they called a house. It was surely a convenient kind of a house, for one could step right over the wall from one room into another, and if a person suddenly decided that a certain room was too small, the moving of a stick-wall or two would make it as large as needed!

But there was one disadvantage. Dogs sometimes ran through the woods, likely as not jumping over the fallen log by the play house. And of course squirrels scampered hither and yon all through the woods. So nearly every time the girls started playing they had to straighten the walls and rearrange the furniture.

One morning, a few days after Peggy made her first visit at the Merrill shack, the girls were re-making the house as usual, when Peggy decided that she didn't have a single stick that was the right size and kind.

"They're all too short and too crooked, every one of them, Mary Jane," she complained. "Let's go down by the swamp and get some reeds. We can pull 'em up by the roots, and they're so straight and long we can make lovely big rooms like a palace."

"But is that too far?" asked Mary Jane doubtfully. She hadn't lived in these woods long enough to feel so much at home running

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around in them as Peggy did. Peggy had been born in the house she now lived in, and she felt as much at home in the woods around there as she did in her own pretty front yard.

“Far nothing!” she exclaimed with a toss of her bobbed head. “Do you think I’d take you far when I promised your mother I wouldn’t, Mary Jane! It’s only right—over—there— See?”

She poked Mary Jane’s head down low till they could look through the bushes and see the sunshine on the cat-tail tops four hundred feet or so off to the southeast.

“Let’s go,” said Mary Jane, “that isn’t any farther than mother’d let me go with you, I know.”

So off they went, hurrying along so fast they didn’t look at anything they passed on the way.

But after they had pulled out a handful of long reeds by the roots from the mud at the edge of the swamp, they didn’t feel so

hurried. They sat down on a grassy patch close to the swamp and started to cover themselves with leaves and grass.

“Let’s play we are babes in the woods and cover ourselves all up,” suggested Peggy, industriously pulling long grass.

“But we’d have to hunt for food a while before we starve to death,” said Mary Jane, who had had the story read to her not so long before, and knew just what ought to happen and when.

“All right,” replied good-natured Peggy, “then we’ll hunt. Only maybe we’ll find something and then that’ll spoil the game ’cause we couldn’t starve to death if we’d have plenty to eat.”

“If we don’t starve to death, we can play something else,” said Mary Jane, who didn’t find playing starve so interesting anyway. “We can be shipwrecked on a desert island and hunt for berries to live on till rescuers come for us.”

"Oh, yes," said Peggy "let's play that 'cause I know where berries are."

Mary Jane thought Peggy was just playing, for the only berries she had ever eaten came from a box in a grocery store. So she was much amazed when Peggy led her off the main path to a clump of bushes and announced, "Here they are! Help yourself!"

And sure enough! Right there in front of her, growing on bushes, were lovely red and black raspberries. Red berries on some bushes and black ones on others.

"Help yourself," repeated Peggy, as she set an example by pulling off one berry after another and putting them in to her mouth.

"Do you just eat 'em," asked Mary Jane, "without washing 'em or having sugar or anything?"

"Goodness, yes," laughed Peggy, who felt very grand to be able to show her new friend so much. "Mother says they're clean enough here 'cause they get rained on and there really



isn't any dirt here in the woods. And sugar! Don't be citified, Mary Jane. They're good this way."

That was true, as Mary Jane found out for herself with the first berry she tasted. There was a wild sweetness in the flavor that made them much better eating than any grocery store raspberries she had ever tasted.

"Let's not just play eat," she said eagerly, "let's really eat! There's plenty here."

There surely was plenty, for the bushes were loaded with fruit, and the deeper the girls explored into the great clump of bushes, the larger and more luscious were the berries. But finally even berries lose their charm, especially when a person has eaten as many as those girls did—they wouldn't want much lunch, that was sure!

"Just look at our hands!" exclaimed Mary Jane, in amazement, when she stopped eating long enough to think of something else. She looked at her hands, and, really, those hands

didn't seem like her hands at all. Mary Jane was a tidy person, usually, but you would never have guessed it then. Her hands were red and stained, and so sticky with the juicy sweetness of the berries, that when she shut them half-way, she could hardly get them open again.

"Humph! Mine are just as sticky as yours," said Peggy, not wanting to be outdone. "Let's go down to the lake and wash 'em off. We can't play house like *this*, and the lake's nearer than the home and a lot more fun."

So down the path they ran, to the tiny lake. A pretty little body of water it was, made by enterprising villagers who had built a dam so that the water from a dozen springs would stay in this pool-like lake two or three hundred feet across, instead of running off in a tiny creek. This summer morning the lake looked most inviting. Willows around the edges made dark, cool-looking shadows, white

clouds overhead were mirrored in the clear water, and off to the south a gentle ripple suggested a refreshing breeze.

The girls ran down to the water and splashed their hands up and down.

“Why it isn’t cold a bit,” exclaimed Mary Jane, in surprise. “It feels good.”

“It would feel better to me in swimming,” said Peggy. “We used to go a lot. Let’s get Alice and your mother and my mother to go some day.”

“Yes, let’s,” agreed Mary Jane.

Just then the town whistle, a screechy fire whistle, blew for noon and the two girls stared at each other. They didn’t dream it was that late, and here they were so far from the play-house they had started from.

“We won’t get a chance to make our rooms before lunch if we don’t hurry,” said Peggy. “Come on,” she added as she shook her hands dry in the warm sunshine and polished them off on her bloomers, “I know a short cut. We

can go right through here and get to the playhouse lots quicker than by going around by the berries and the swamp the way we came.

She hurried off with Mary Jane following closely behind.

Through the trees and underbrush they ran, thinking all the while of the playhouse, till they came to where a fallen tree quite blocked their path.

"Never mind, we can go around it," said Peggy when she saw what they had run into.

"Oh, let's climb it first," said Mary Jane. She always loved to climb things. "It's such a good one to climb, the way it sticks up." For this tree was not dead when it fell to the ground. It was alive and full of branches and leaves. Its strong branches kept the tip of the tall tree from reaching the ground, so the trunk inclined at quite an angle upward along which it would be fun to climb.

Mary Jane ran around to the root end,

scrambled up into the trunk and started climbing, Peggy not so very far behind. At first it was "easy as pie," as Peggy declared. The trunk was broad and near the ground, and walking was as easy as on a sidewalk. But as she went along, the trunk got smaller, of course, and at the same time was higher from the ground. But even so, it didn't look very scary, for the leaves and branches, still green, kept a person from seeing how far away the ground was getting, and what a long fall any fall would surely be.

"Isn't it fun?" laughed Peggy as she balanced gaily at the point where a first big branch started out from the trunk. "I'd like to sit down here and play train."

"Oh, not there," said Mary Jane, who was a few feet ahead, "come on up here and you can take one branch for your station and I'll take the next for mine and we can play it better."

"All right," replied Peggy contentedly,

“and I’m going to call my station Walawalla ‘cause that’s such a funny name.”

“I should say it is,” giggled Mary Jane, and she tried to say it without laughing, “Walawalla—Walawalla. I’m going to call mine——”

But just what the other station was going to be called Peggy didn’t find out. Mary Jane had turned around to laugh at her friend and instead of stopping while she was looking back, as a person really should when they’re walking up a tree, she stepped right along. And of course she didn’t notice that the tree trunk had a little bend right there. No, she didn’t even suspect that bend. And so, of course, she walked right off the tree and disappeared!

Peggy saw her fall, and screamed, but a scream doesn’t put a person back on a tree—not even a loud scream will do that!

For a second, Peggy didn’t know what to do. Should she run back down the tree to

the ground and then run around the tree to the place where Mary Jane most likely was; or should she carefully go on up the trunk as she had been going till she came to the place where Mary Jane disappeared and then look down and see what had happened?

Mary Jane settled that important question for her.

“Peggy! Peggy!” she called, and to Peggy’s vast relief the voice was not frightened or distressed, as it surely would have been, had Mary Jane been hurt. “Peggy! Come here! I’ve found a new house for us!”

“A new house!” exclaimed Peggy in amazement, for that was about the last thing in the world she expected to hear from a little girl who had disappeared under a fallen tree. “What kind of a house?” And as she spoke, she crawled carefully on up the tree to the place where Mary Jane had disappeared. And when she was there, she leaned over and looked down at her friend.



"See," said Mary Jane, pointing around to the leafy bower she stood in. "All the branches make walls, and there's a ceiling and it's the best house I ever was in. You slide off the trunk and come down. It doesn't hurt a bit, Peggy, and we'll make a door and then it'll be perfect."

"But how do you think you're going to get out?" asked Peggy, for from where she was perched on the tree trunk, she could see that Mary Jane was entirely surrounded by leaf branches that hemmed her in closely.

"Well, we'll wait till you get in, Peggy," laughed Mary Jane comfortably, "and then we'll figure some way to get out. There must always be a way to get out, if you get in!

"Now sit down on the trunk and slide, Peggy," she urged her friend, "it won't hurt, a bit and it's lots of fun!"

Peggy thought that good advice. The leaf-house looked very cool and inviting and, anyway, she wanted to try anything Mary Jane

liked. So she sat down on the trunk and started to wiggle herself off so she would slide gently down to where Mary Jane had fallen.

## FUN AT THE TREE HOUSE

**B**UT alas for Peggy! Her plan was good, but she didn't figure on two things. A rough place on the trunk—and her own bloomers! For just the instant she lost her balance and should by rights have slipped down gently to the ground, those bloomers caught on a jagged place on the trunk and there she hung!

She grabbed frantically at the trunk but she couldn't reach it. She squirmed desperately, but those bloomers held. Hadn't her mother bought that very goods because it was so strong? There's no telling how long she might have hung there, just out of Mary Jane's reach, if Alice hadn't come hunting them for lunch.

"Help! Help! Help!" screamed Peggy.

"Well, Peggy Rodney!" exclaimed Alice as she caught sight of her sister's friend,

“how in the world did you get *there*?” And without waiting to have an answer to such a question she ran around to the trunk end, dashed up the tree, caught poor Peggy’s hands and pulled her up to safety.

“Well,” said Peggy as she drew a long, comforted breath, “that’s a good thing!”

“I should say it was!” exclaimed Alice, trying not to laugh at her, “what *were* you trying to do?”

“To get down to Mary Jane,” replied Peggy simply, “and my bloomers caught.”

“So I suspected,” laughed Alice. “And where’s Mary Jane?”

“Here I am,” replied Mary Jane’s littlest voice down under their feet.

Alice jumped so she nearly lost her footing.

“How did you get there?” she asked, “and what *are* you girls doing this morning?”

“We’ve found a playhouse,” said Mary Jane, eagerly, and now that she saw every thing really was all right, she spoke up as

happily as you please, "I just fell into it, is the way we found it, you know. And you come down too, Alice, and show us how to make a door to get out—it's a lovely house only there isn't any get-out place."

Alice peered down into the shadows where her sister was, and saw what a good shelter she was in, and what a jolly playhouse it would make.

"Just you wait till we get there," she promised, "and we'll have a doorway." Grasping Peggy firmly under the shoulders, she half pushed and half lifted her off the tree trunk and down to the ground. Of course she couldn't hold her till Peggy really touched the ground, she couldn't reach that far. But she held her till Peggy was balanced well and could drop safely to the ground.

"Now then," she said, when she saw the little girl was safe, "I'm coming! Watch out!"

She turned and sat on the trunk and then,

making sure, first, that her skirts were not caught so that she would be held as Peggy had been, she slid down into the tree house.

“That’s a good trick door,” she laughed as she touched the ground. “You might play this was a magic fairy house and folks could only get in that one way.”

“That would be fun,” admitted Mary Jane who loved anything fairylike, “only how’d we get out ourselves when it’s lunch time?”

“That’s the point,” admitted Alice, “and the worst of it is, it’s lunch time now. So we’ll have to hustle to release ourselves from the tree enchantment. I think,” she added, “that this is the best way out.”

She pointed to one side where some of the dozens of branches that great tree had, were caught on a stump close by. This held a few branches up from the ground and with a little coaxing would make a fine passageway.

“You girls help hold these,” said Alice as

she picked up a few small branches and pushed them to one side, "and I'll see if I can break some off."

It was pretty hard work, for the tree had not been down long, that was plain to see. The leaves were still green and fresh and the branches were firm and wiry. But by all three working, pushing, breaking and holding, they made their way out to the open air.

"There!" exclaimed Alice when they actually were outside, "that was fun! You've found a good playhouse, honey. I'll bet you have a lot of fun there. Only now, you'd better come to lunch, mother'll be waiting. Peggy, you skip up the path there, and ask your mother if you may stay with us. We're having your favorite sandwiches and some iced cocoa and cookies, so you'd better come."

Peggy went as directed, and five minutes later she reached the Merrill's shack, freshly combed and washed and very hungry, in spite of all the raspberries she had eaten.



All the time they were eating lunch the girls talked about the new tree house. It isn't every morning one makes such a big discovery as that! They planned to live there all afternoon.

"But you shouldn't do that," interrupted Mrs. Merrill, "because both of you girls are supposed to take an hour's rest in the afternoon while it's so hot."

"It isn't hot in that house," exclaimed Mary Jane proudly, "you should come and see it, mother, really you should."

"I think I will," agreed Mrs. Merrill. "I'll go down there with you now. Then I can see how lovely it is and know just where to find you. Suppose you play there for an hour. I can let you take the kitchen alarm clock. We'll set that for one hour. Then you may play till it rings. Then come home and rest an hour and then, if you want to play more to-day, we'll see."

That wasn't such a bad plan, the girls

thought, so they all four set out to show off the new house. Mrs. Merrill carried the alarm clock, Mary Jane and Peggy were loaded with old cushions they could use to sit on, and Alice carried a clean piece of burlap the girls wanted to hang over the doorway, to close it behind them.

Mrs. Merrill was just as delighted with the house as the girls had hoped she would be.

"I don't wonder you want to play here," she said enthusiastically, "any little girl would! Why don't you bring some little old chairs—you know you have one, Mary Jane, that we sent out from the storeroom, and maybe Peggy has one in her attic. Then you can fix this up like a truly house and play here on hot days."

"And we can bring dishes for the berries," added Peggy, delighted with housekeeping plans.

"Will your mother let you bring berries

down here?" asked Mrs. Merrill doubtfully, "you know berries are expensive and crush easily. Wouldn't bananas be better? You know you like them very much."

"Oh, but mother," exclaimed Mary Jane, "you don't have to buy berries here in the woods, you just pick 'em." And, delighted that she had so much new to show her mother and Alice, Mary Jane hurried out from the new playhouse, and led them down the path to where the berries grew.

"Oh, yum!" exclaimed Alice as she tasted her first wild raspberry, "why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"These are delicious," added Mrs. Merrill, "are there many around, Peggy? I think they would make wonderful jam."

"Oh, there are loads," replied Peggy, with a reckless wave of her hand, "only if we wait long to pick them, folks in the village will find out they're ripe and then we won't get so many."

"Then let's pick some right away," urged Alice. "I'll run back to the house and get some cups—it won't take two minutes, mother, and we'll all pick."

"But when can we fix the playhouse?" asked Peggy. Picking berries was an old story to her, and the playhouse was new and very enticing.

"You and Mary Jane may do that now, if you like," began Mrs. Merrill. Then she glanced at Mary Jane and saw that she wanted to pick berries even more than she wanted to play in the leaf-house. "Suppose we all pick berries for half an hour," she said. "Then you and Mary Jane plan what you want to do in your house, and then, when you are through with your rest, you can come right down here and get to work furnishing."

Both girls thought that a good idea and as Alice was back with the cups just then, they all set to picking.

It was fun to pick berries. Of course a per-

son got pretty scratched sometimes, as the long branches of the bushes were awfully briary and thorny. But all the same, it was fun to hear the berries patter into the tin cups and to see the pile of luscious sweetness, grow and grow, in the cup.

Before the half-hour was up, Mrs. Merrill and Alice had their cups full and were dropping berries into Peggy's or Mary Jane's—who ever was nearest.

"I'm going over here," said Alice as she pointed to a beautiful clump of bushes they had not noticed. "I just know there are some big ones there."

She crossed the grassy space between the clumps, pushed her way into the bushes, and then stopped short. Something was wrong. Right over her head far enough to be out of reach, but near enough that one couldn't overlook it, was a fluttering bird calling in tones of great distress.

"What's the matter with it?" Alice asked

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her mother, "I'm not doing anything to it?"

"Maybe someone else is or has," suggested Mrs. Merrill, looking close at the distressed bird, "if you pay no attention to it, it will be better, perhaps."

So Alice pushed on a bit into the berry bushes and reached out to pick some great big berries she plainly saw. But as her hand reached out for the berries, the bird called and called again.

Alice looked around. Not a thing did she see. She looked in the tree overhead—no nest in sight. She looked around, no sign of any other birds disturbing this poor creature. She looked down in among the berry bushes—and there she saw what was the matter. Right there in front of her, so close that another step might have ruined it, was a tiny nest apparently just laid in the bushes. And in the nest were three little baby birds, so little and so helpless that they couldn't look after themselves.

Alice backed away, partly because she didn't want to run the risk of shaking the nest from its place in the crook of the bushes, and partly because she wanted to let the mother bird know that she didn't intend to hurt the precious babies.

"Come! Come over here and see what it is," she called to the others who were waiting and watching wonderingly.

"It's a bunting's nest," said Mrs. Merrill the minute she spied it, "I ought to have remembered that buntings nest in shrubs and bushes. Poor thing! It's a pity we can't let the mother know how safe her babies are with us. Look well, girls, for that's a beautiful nest. And then we must get away so that poor mother will stop worrying."

The girls took a good look at the dainty nest, set there so gracefully but so uncertainly, then they walked away so the mother bird could have peace.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mary Jane, as they



walked back to the house with their berries, "this has been a fine day—a tree-house, berries, and now a bird's nest! Peggy," she added, "what shall we put in our house?"

And they set to making plans.

## STORM AND FLOOD

**F**OR two days the girls played in the tree-house most of the time. They had the ground that was the floor swept clean as a pin; they hung the burlap for a curtain at the doorway to keep folks and creatures out, and they fixed a row of shelves in a berry crate at one side for a cupboard. It was all great fun, and the girls dearly loved their house.

But the third day was hot and sultry. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the tree-house was close and uncomfortable. Each mosquito that prowled his way in under the leaves liked the tree-house so well that he stayed there—not a single breeze came along to drive him away.

“Why don’t you put citronella oil on your burlap?” suggested Alice when the girls came up to the shack complaining of the heat and mosquitoes.

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"I know something better than that," said Mrs. Merrill pleasantly. "Why don't you stay right here on this big cool porch—for if it isn't really cool, it's as near cool as any place you will find to-day—and think up something to play in the swing? Then as soon as the iceman comes around, you may make some ice cream in your own little freezer."

Peggy didn't understand, so Mary Jane climbed up in a chair in the pantry, and got down the freezer to show it off. Her Uncle Hal had given it to her the summer before, but she hadn't used it much, for in their apartment there was no good place where a little girl could muss around with ice.

"You mean we can make some ice cream all by ourselves?" asked Mary Jane. The plan sounded fun, but she didn't want to misunderstand. "I don't know how."

"That's just what I mean," said Mrs. Merrill. "Maybe you don't know how—now. But I guess you can learn. If you like, you may

fix your milk now, and then it can cool while you wait for the iceman."

"I like ice cream," said Peggy. "How much can we make, and when is the iceman coming?"

"You may make as much as the freezer will hold," answered Mrs. Merrill. I think that is two piled-up dishfuls. And the iceman ought to be here any minute—unless a storm delays him," she added as she glanced at the darkening sky.

The girls ran in to the kitchen, and under Mrs. Merrill's suggestions prepared the ice cream ready for freezing. They put milk and cream and sugar into a small sauce-pan and brought it just to a boil; then they added a few drops of vanilla and set it all out away from the stove to cool. This was to be the very easiest ice cream possible to make, so they didn't bother with eggs or thickening, or whipping cream.

"Now let's play on the porch till the ice-

man comes," suggested Mary Jane when she was sure that nothing more they could do would help hurry the ice cream along.

"You take the swing for yours, Peggy," she continued, generously, "and I'll take the couch over here, and we'll play boat."

She gave Peggy Mr. Merrill's old cane that he liked to carry when tramping, and she took the oldest umbrella the Merrill family owned—and it was pretty old, too. These were paddles for the boats.

"I'll make mine hurry along," said Peggy, quickly responding to Mary Jane's idea, "and I'll be going very fast." With a quick poke at the floor, first on one side and then on the other, she got the swing to going longwise in a quick, jerky motion.

"Mine's tied to the dock," began Mary Jane, then suddenly she changed her mind, "no, it isn't either," she exclaimed, "it's aground. It's stuck on a mud bar in the Mississippi River, and I'll have to work

and work to get it off. Maybe you'd better bring your boat over here and try to tow me."

Peggy made a desperate effort at friendly aid, but no matter how hard she poked at the floor or how fast the swing went, it simply would not cover the twelve feet or so that separated it from the couch over at the other side of the porch.

"Well," sighed Mary Jane, when she saw that no help could reach her. "I guess I'll just have to stay here all night and maybe in the morning——"

"Iceman! Iceman! Want any ice to-day?" called a voice at the back door.

"Yes, we do," cried Mary Jane, hopping off the couch in a jiffy, "we want fifty pounds, and please won't you chop off a little piece so we can make ice cream?"

When the iceman saw the size of that tiny freezer he laughed long and hard.

"Why I could put that thing in my coat

pocket and not know I had anything!" he exclaimed, good-naturedly.

"Yes, but you *would* have something," Mary Jane assured him, "you'd have my ice cream freezer, and if it had ice cream in it, your pocket'd get wet, I know it would."

"Right you are," he admitted, "and I'll tell you something else. If I chop your ice for you with one whack or two of my ice pick, you'll get your ice cream a lot quicker than if *you* chop it."

"'Deed we will," agreed Mary Jane. "Are you going to chop it?"

That's just what he did. Chopped the ice, showed them how to fix the can in the wooden part of the freezer and how to pack in the ice with salt, all before Mrs. Merrill noticed what good advice and help they were getting.

"Mike always does something nice," Peggy said after the man was gone, when they told Mrs. Merrill about him. "He's been on this route ever since I can remember, and he's al-



ways kind, that way. Now hustle up, Mary Jane, it's my turn to crank."

In just five minutes the ice cream was frozen, and in one minute more it was out in two sauce dishes being eaten up by two very happy little girls.

After the last drop of sweetness was licked off the spoons and dishes, the girls put them in the kitchen sink and went back to the fun of "boats."

"I think that while we've been away, a tug pulled my boat off the mud bank and now I'm going down stream," Mary Jane.

"And I'll paddle hard to keep ahead and show you the way," said Peggy.

She poked and poked at the floor and got her swing going so hard that it banged into the side of the house on one side and the outside of the porch on the other.

Bang!—Bang! Just that way.

Just at the instant of the second bang there was a terrible noise as though the world was

falling down. The girls couldn't think what had happened.

Peggy jumped out of the racing swing in a bound; Mary Jane sat as though carved out of stone—her ragged umbrella poised mid-air.

Again that terrible noise through the woods.

“It'd thunder,” said Peggy, “but did you ever hear such *loud* thunder? I guess I'd better hurry home.”

But before she had a chance to get out of the door, a deluge of water came down. It didn't seem like rain, there was so much of it. It just seemed like oceans of water falling down right on that little shack.

Mrs. Merrill and Alice, who had been upstairs, came running down to see if the two girls were safely in the house—they might have gone out of doors to play.

The four of them just stood there and stared at the falling water, but not for long, for there was work to do. A wind started blowing and the rain began coming in.

“Take down the swing, Alice,” shouted Mrs. Merrill, over the noise of the storm. “Mary Jane, pull the couch over to the middle of the porch—no, I guess you and Peggy had better carry it into the house.”

As she talked, she hurried from window to window, shutting up the little shack and locking each window tight against the wind.

“The upstairs!” exclaimed Alice, “it’s coming in the sleeping porch, I know. Let’s all go!”

Peggy and Mary Jane needed no invitation. There was something strange about the terrible force of the sudden storm, that made them rather be most anywhere *with* somebody than to stay alone. So the four dashed upstairs.

It was lucky Alice thought of the upstairs when she did, for they had just time to drag the beds to the center of the great porch before they too were wet by the driving rain that blew in. Then, when things were as shel-

tered as folks could make them, they all sat down on the nearest cots and watched the rain.

“Look at the creek!” exclaimed Alice. They had to look twice to believe their own eyes. That little creek that only ten minutes before was dry as a desert was a foaming, tossing river. Muddy, bubbling water tossed and churned as it raced along. The land nearby was sloping toward this creek bed, and all the water that in such a sudden downpour couldn’t possibly be soaked up, even by dry ground, was draining straight for the creek. Through the trees the watchers could plainly see the foaming water as it dashed toward the place where the drain tile was set.

Of course all that water couldn’t go through the drain tile—not even that big tile! And it had to go somewhere so it spread out all over the yard and garden.

“Look! The pansy bed’s all covered up!” exclaimed Mary Jane.

"Now the geraniums are almost out of sight!" cried Alice, "Oh, mother, do you suppose it will wash them all away?"

"Can't tell, dear," said Mrs. Merrill, "I never *saw* such a storm. See the water just seems to come down in sheets."

Silently for a few minutes the four watched the storm. So great was the noise it was impossible to make oneself heard except by shouting, anyway.

Then the water came a little more slowly, a little more like regular rain.

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Alice eagerly, "let's put on rubbers and raincoats and go out in the yard where we can see it all. Come on, let's."

"I believe we can," said Mrs. Merrill, considering carefully. "There may never again be such a curious storm and you ought to see the whole thing. It shows you so perfectly just how water acts and drains off. Let's hurry."

There was a scramble each to get her own rain things, and to fit out Peggy, and then they all went out into the yard.

By this time it had almost stopped raining. The trees swayed and dripped, the creek tossed and roared, and a distant rumble of thunder told them that the storm was running away to the northeast.

Such a sight as that garden was! Not a flower-bed could be seen. Tops of geraniums and cosmos spread out on the water so the girls could tell that the plants were bent low in the current. In the vegetable garden the water was spread over more surface so it wasn't so deep, but it rushed and tumbled like a river just the same.

From a rise in the ground where they could be fairly dry, the girls watched the water. Although the rain had stopped by now, riverlets of water rushed down the hillsides into the lake in the garden. Sticks, branches and

broken flowers tossed and whirled out over the vegetable garden.

“Let’s go up to the creek,” said Mary Jane, “and throw in things for boats.”

“I don’t think you need to throw in anything,” said Mrs. Merrill. “This water will put enough rubbish on the garden without your adding any more. Why don’t you run up there and then each pick out something already in the current and call that yours. Then you can watch it and see which girl’s stick reaches the garden first. That will be just as much fun and not so much damage.”

The girls played race boats: they ran up and down the side of the creek watching the tumbling water and thought it great fun. But alas for them! In half an hour most of the water had run off; the current disappeared almost as suddenly as it came, for as soon as that water was gone out over the vegetable garden, there was no other water to take its



place—the storm was as short as it was sudden, and soon the girls went back to the house to find other fun.

## MAKING A DAM

“**I** WISH there was always water in the creek!” said Mary Jane.

She and Peggy were walking along the side of the gully the morning after the big storm. Yesterday, for a couple of hours, the little creek had been a rushing, tumbling body of water. Mary Jane had loved it. She liked to hear the roar as it whirled itself against the high bank at the sharp turn by the corner of their lot. She liked to watch sticks and leaves whirl and tumble and toss as they rushed along to the garden.

But this morning! If it hadn't been for the bent-down pansies and geraniums and the great holes washed out of the vegetable garden, no one would have guessed how big that creek was only yesterday. For it was again back to its accustomed trickle in the center of its gravelly bed.

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"I tell you what," suggested Peggy with a sudden inspiration, "let's make us a dam. That'll make the creek bigger."

"Will it?" asked Mary Jane doubtfully. She didn't know much about dams. "How do you work a dam?"

"Like over at the lake," explained Peggy. "My father showed me all about that. Years ago there wasn't anything there but a creek—oh, I guess it was a lot bigger than your creek, but it wasn't a lake. And then folks had that road built across the creek and made a solid wall of cement and dirt and all. And then they got a lake just like they intended to, you see."

"Well," replied Mary Jane practically, "we can't build a road here; we don't want one anyway."

"Silly, no," laughed Peggy. "But we can make a dam of sticks and things, and make the water stay here in the creek where we want it."

“Oh, I know,” cried Mary Jane, suddenly remembering, “like beavers do.” Her mother had read to her much about beavers and how they work.

It was Peggy’s turn to question now, for she didn’t know any more about beavers than Mary Jane had about dams and the lake.

“Beavers are pretty little creatures, bigger than squirrels,” Mary Jane explained, “and when the water where they live gets low, they build dams to make it get higher.”

“Do they do it on purpose?” asked Peggy wonderingly.

“’Deed they do,” Mary Jane assured her, “they know a lot! They cut strong branches with their sharp teeth and lay those just right with the current—mother’s showed me pictures. And then they put sticks and stones and twigs and rubbish to fill in between.”

“Well then,” said Peggy positively, “I think if beavers are smart enough to make a dam, we can too.”

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And Mary Jane said, "Yes, let's."

"Then we'll have to decide where to make it and everything," continued Peggy. "I expect we'll get our feet wet," she added, "'cause even though the water's mostly gone from the creek there's a lot of mud left."

"Let's ask if we can go barefoot," suggested Mary Jane. She never had been barefooted to amount to anything, but she always thought it great fun.

"I don't believe you'd better," said Mrs. Merrill thoughtfully, when she was appealed to about it. "You see, there's no telling what broken glass or wire or rubbish may have been tossed into that gully and washed into the creek bottom. And it wouldn't help the dam a bit if you got hurt feet, would it? Suppose instead of really going barefoot, you hunt up those awful-looking old sandals we brought out. Remember, Mary Jane, we were going to throw them out last fall and we forgot,

and then this spring we thought maybe they'd come in handy out here? Of course Alice's are a little big for Peggy, but maybe I can tie them on. Then you could take off your stockings and be nearly barefoot without running any risk of hurts."

With Alice's help Mary Jane found the sandals all right, and the girls went out to the back steps to try them on. By the time Mary Jane had taken off her shoes and stockings and stepped around on the ground a few steps just for fun, she was quite willing to wear sandals. You see this was woods, not a soft city lawn, and the grass was full of sharp sticks and twigs that felt awfully prickly to a little girl's bare foot. But with sandals on, a person could be just as cool and comfortable as barefoot, and not have the funny feeling of things tickling.

With the sandals fastened on firmly and dresses tucked into bloomers so no skirts could get in the way, the two girls ran down to begin

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work. First they gathered long sticks. These were for putting clear across the creek a little higher than the water line was now. Then they gathered a lot of small twigs with leaves attached and handful of tiny sticks. Then the fun began.

Mary Jane went on one side of the creek and Peggy stayed on the other, and they began laying the material in place.

"We have to make it curve upstream," said Mary Jane, "just like the beavers do."

"I don't see what that means," replied Peggy, in a puzzled tone of voice.

"Why, it's easy," said Mary Jane, who, now that she got to work, found that she remembered a lot that had been read to her about beavers. "If the dam curves down, the water can carry it away easily, when a big current comes along. But if the dam curves toward the upstream, then a big current spreads out and the dam stays."



“Well, then, you do it,” said Peggy, who didn’t for the life of her understand, and didn’t like to admit it.

So Mary Jane took one end of the longest, strongest stick, and with Peggy holding to the other end, laid it curvingly across the creek. They stamped the ends down into the muddy bank and quickly laid other sticks and others, along the same way. Then they waded right out into the mud and built in the filling of little twigs and sticks.

“It’s making the water stay!” exclaimed Peggy excitedly. “Look, Mary Jane! The dam works!”

Mary Jane raised up from her work and looked where Peggy pointed. Sure enough! The creek, that before they began was only a little trickle of muddy water, was now, above the dam, twice as wide as before. And there was hardly a drop of water below the dam.

“Alice! Alice!” called Mary Jane, “come see how our dam works!”

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Alice who had been working on her flower book at the porch table, dropped her work and came running to see.

"Why of course it works," she said admiringly. "Did you think two folks as smart as you girls couldn't build a dam? Of course you can. You'll be having a lake before you know it."

It really did seem so, for even as the girls watched, the trickling water dribbled down toward the dam and stayed there till it spread out to the buttercups and violet plants close by.

"We'll have to get some water lilies to grow here," said Peggy eagerly, "and some goldfish. Let's have goldfish, Mary Jane."

But plans were interrupted sooner than the girls expected. There was a rush through the woods, and Peggy's beautiful collie, Shep, came dashing down to find his little mistress.

"Shep! Watch out!" screamed Peggy, but

it was too late. Shep, in his eagerness to get near her, didn't notice a thing about the dam and splashed right across the newly-forming lake and stood on the dam.

He looked with wonder at his little mistress as she screamed and pulled at him. How was he to know that what looked like a pile of sticks was really a carefully built dam? But finally Peggy coaxed him off and then such a wreck as that dam was!

"Never you mind, girls," said Alice when she saw how disappointed the two friends were, "I'll help, and we'll have that dam back good as ever in no time—you just see."

She ran up to the back of the house, got a long board and laid it across the muddy creek bottom. She could stand on this and work without getting muddy or wet. Mary Jane worked at one end and Peggy at the other, and with Alice building and straightening in the middle all the time, it wasn't five minutes till the dam was back in place, good as new.

"Now then," said Mary Jane, "let's watch the lake get made."

The three girls climbed up the bank on the high side of the creek and sat there resting and watching.

"The mud on my foot tickles," said Mary Jane in a minute. She wiggled her feet, and the brown mud that so quickly dried on a warm day like this, cracked off in pieces.

"Why don't you wash off your feet?" asked Alice. "I'll tell you what I'll do," she added. "I'll get a bucket of water and pour it over your feet. You can take those old sandals off when you get on the nice grass in the back yard, and then you can let me pour the water and you can wash off the mud on the grass."

That was jolly fun, and soon their feet were clean and comfortable, and it didn't take long for them to dry on such a fine day.

"Now let's go over and look at our lake,"

said Mary Jane as she gave her feet a final polish on a clean spot of grass.

But before they could go a step, Mrs. Merrill called from the house, "Want to go on a picnic—all of you?"

"A picnic!" exclaimed Mary Jane. "Where is it?"

"Who's picnic?" questioned Peggy.

Alice didn't say a word, for she knew what her mother was planning, but hadn't wanted to spoil the surprise by telling.

"You know Peggy's been telling us about the daisy field over by the gravel pit?" asked Mrs. Merrill, and the girls nodded. Hadn't Peggy been telling them they should see the gravel pit and the daisies and everything? She certainly had!

"I thought it would be fun to take our lunches and walk through the woods," continued Mrs. Merrill. "Peggy, you run up and ask your mother if you may go with us. Tell her to come too if she can, I have plenty of

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food for us all. Then we can start as soon as you get back."

While Peggy was gone, Mary Jane put her shoes and stockings back on, so her legs wouldn't get all scratched up if she wanted to walk through bushes or shrubbery. Mrs. Merrill and Alice packed the sandwiches, fruit and cookies in two pasteboard boxes, so the load could be divided and there would be nothing to carry home, as when a person takes a basket.

Peggy came dashing down the path from her home.

"Mother's coming, she says," the little girl announced, "and she's bringing half a brand-new chocolate cake and some milk that's good and cold. We've paper cups for it, too."

"Well," said Mrs. Merrill laughingly, "I think we didn't name this right. It's not so much a picnic as a feast!"

"We can eat it all either way," said Alice. "Here's the key, mother, let's go."

And off they started through the woods to meet Peggy's mother at the end of the nearest path.



## THE NEIGHBORS ON THE HILL

**A**FTER wandering twenty minutes or more through the woods, the little party came out on a paved road along which they walked for a quarter of a mile. Then Peggy turned them off to the right along a fresh and very rough road, around the side of a low hill, and then they all stopped in amazement at the sight that met their eyes.

Daisies in front of them, to the left, and to the right—so many daisies that there seemed to be nothing else on the ground—just those beautiful white blossoms. And a gentle summer breeze blew by just then, and the daisies all waved their white faces and nodded.

“Just exactly as though they were saying, ‘How do you do?’ ” exclaimed Mary Jane, happily, “ ‘and please won’t you come in and have your picnic here!’ ”

"If that's what they're saying, we'll say, 'Yes, thank you,' " laughed Mrs. Merrill, "and I must say I never saw a lovelier place."

"It's unusually beautiful this year," said Mrs. Rodney. "When there are no blooming daisies, the place looks pretty rough—it's nothing but an old gravel pit, with these daisies grown over the old, neglected part. The part they are now using is way over there," she added, pointing off to the east. "But when the daisies cover up everything else, it looks almost like fairyland. I'm so glad you thought of coming."

"Want to play a while, girls, or will you eat first?" asked Mrs. Merrill.

"Let's have the picnic, and then play," suggested Mary Jane. "We've been working this morning, mother—we're starved, we are truly!"

So the party found a clean place, grassy and surrounded with daisies and shaded by a great sycamore tree. There they spread their

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lunch. And there they lingered long after every scrap of food was either eaten or fed to Shep, who had of course followed them. It was fun getting acquainted with new neighbors who liked woods and picnics and flowers the same as the Merrills did.

“Why don’t you make some daisy chains or crowns or things like that?” suggested Mrs. Merrill presently. So while she and Mrs. Rodney mended stockings and visited, the girls ran hither and yon, gathering daisies by the armful, weaving chains and making crowns. Mrs. Rodney told them they need have no fear of picking all the daisies they wanted, for the daisies were plentiful and grew so easily.

“Just remember to leave a few blooms in every clump,” she added, “I think the daisies grow by roots coming up over and over each year. But all the same, it’s a safe rule with all sorts of wild flowers to leave a few blooms on every plant. Then the seeds can form and

drop down just as nature meant them to. ”

So the girls were careful to pick here and there, instead of stripping each plant they picked from. But dear me! With such millions of flowers around them, it was no time at all till they each had an armful! Then they sat down in the shade, and made things.

Alice made a crown for the daisy queen. Mary Jane made bracelets for each girl. Peggy made necklaces, and they all worked on chains to stretch from tree to tree to make a throne.

They were just ready to decide who should be queen and start playing, when Mrs. Rodney called that it was time to go home.

“But, mother!” exclaimed Peggy in distress, “we *can’t* go home yet! The game’s just beginning. We’ve everything ready for a queen, and we’ve got to stay and have her be it.”

“Sorry, dear,” replied Mrs. Rodney, “but

we can't stay. I have jam to make and Mrs. Merrill has her work to do too. And you girlyies can't stay all by yourselves so far from home."

"I'll tell you what you can do," suggested Mrs. Merrill. She never liked to spoil a game if there was a possible way to avoid it. "You girls carry your daisy things on your shoulders—you haven't too many, I'm sure, and it isn't a long walk. Then you can go right along playing in our back yard. You can have a throne on the hillside west of the garden—that will be better than here. And I'll give you a rug to put over it so it will look very grand and elegant."

The girls were delighted with that plan, so they set to work packing up daisy chains, necklaces and bracelets. Mary Jane carried half the chains wound round and round her neck. Peggy carried the other half. Alice rescued the lunch box and packed the bracelets, necklaces and crown in it, so she could

carry them safely. And the little procession started for home.

As they walked along the road many a passing autoist looked curiously at the daisy-laden children, but that didn't bother Mary Jane and Peggy one bit — they liked it.

As soon as they reached home, Mrs. Merrill got them the rug she had promised. It was an old crex rug, clean and brown—plenty good enough to spread out on the grass to make a throne, and long enough to reach down the hillside a way so the throne could look really imposing.

“Now who's going to be queen?” asked Alice.

“I guess I will,” said Peggy promptly.

“Well, I was a-going to be,” Mary Jane said in a very disappointed voice.

“I don't see what you both want that job for,” said Alice, wondering how in the world she could decide between them. “Why it's

nothing interesting. Just have to sit up there on that rug with a crown on your head while we play around and do things."

"Then I'll let Peggy be it," said Mary Jane promptly.

"Mary Jane can be queen," said Peggy at exactly the same time.

Alice laughed. "You girls are funny folks! First you both want it—then neither of you wants it. I'll tell you what let's do. Let's get that great big doll of yours, Mary Jane, that one you hardly ever use, it's so big. We can prop her up on a chair and put the crown on her head. And then she can just sit there and be queen, while we do anything we like in the court. I've always thought the court ladies had a lot more fun than the person who had to sit so properly on an old throne, anyway."

Mary Jane hurried up to the house and hunted up her doll. It certainly was a good thing that Mrs. Merrill thought to bring



out a whole box full of dolls and things for her little girl.

Miss Queen was dressed in white with a yellow belt—for gold of course the yellow was; the crown of daisies was put on her head, a chain of daisies was hung around her neck, and she was set upon the leaf-cover chair that was her throne.

“There now,” said Mary Jane, as they stepped off admiring their work, “she looks fine. Now let’s fix these daisy chains to make a pathway up to the throne. And remember! You can’t turn your back to the queen. She’ll send you out of the court, if you do. That’s a court rule.”

Each girl picked up one of the daisy chains, fastened it to something up near the throne, and then, walking face to the queen, carried it gently down the slope, down and down—as far as it would reach. There were to be four in all—two on each side. Peggy had the nearest one on the queen’s left, Alice the far one,

and Mary Jane had one of those that was to go on the right.

Perhaps it was because they had their backs turned to the garden so they could face the queen—perhaps that was the reason they didn't see anything. Perhaps there was so little to see that they wouldn't have noticed anyway. Who knows?

At any rate, they didn't suppose anybody or any creature was anywhere near. Mrs. Rodney had taken Shep home with her, as he was almost too rough to play with daisy chains. Chickens were safe behind their own fence. Squirrels never came back into the garden——

But all the same, just as she laid down the last length of daisy chain, Mary Jane saw *something* run. She didn't have an idea what it was, but she saw it out of the corner of her eye, just as plain as could be.

“What was that?” she called, and all three girls promptly forgot about court rules and

whirled around to see what Mary Jane could be talking about.

Not a person, not a creature was to be seen.

“What was what?” asked Alice looking all over the place.

“I don’t know what it was,” admitted Mary Jane. “But I saw something. I *think* it was gray and white. And it ran and stopped and ran and stopped, and then ran some more.”

“Where did you see it last?” asked Alice.

“There!” said Mary Jane, pointing to a place off to the right where long grass grew close up to a clump of bushes.

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Alice, “we don’t want to go into that mess! Dad said he was going to cut down that grass on Saturday surely, ’cause it looks so long and untidy. I think you just *thought* you saw something, honey.”

“No, I didn’t,” said Mary Jane positively.

“Something was there. I saw it move. And

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I'm going to find it—I don't care if the grass is long!"

She dashed down the side of the hill and over to the clump she had pointed to.

And as she poked her hand into the tall grass, a little creature, gray and white, just as Mary Jane had said, frightened and hurried and distressed, ran out on the other side. But Mary Jane didn't see.

She didn't even see when a second little creature, likewise gray and white, ran out behind the shrubbery and off along the side of the creek. How could she see all that, when the bushes were thick with green leaves, and the grass tall and so heavy?

She pushed and pushed the grass. Alice and Peggy came to help her—though to tell the truth, they didn't expect to find a thing. They were sure she was mistaken about seeing anything.

Back of the grass, down in the shrubbery where no one would have ever guessed it was

there, was a piece of tiling. No doubt workmen had left it years ago when they put the tiling in where the Merrill's garden now was. This tiling was big enough for Mary Jane to crawl through with room to spare, and it was about three feet long. In the bottom was rubbish—straws and grass and leaves, blown there, no doubt by rain and wind. When Mary Jane had the grass pushed away enough that she could get a good look at the tiling, she bent down to peep inside.

And what do you suppose she saw there, all nestled up as snug and comfortable and cosy as you please?

Five tiny gray and white rabbits—regular little cottontails they were, for each one had a tiny ball of white for a tail.

“It must have been the mother you saw,” said Alice, as she too saw the nest. “These are too little to be running around, I’m sure.”

“Then she run away out the back door,” said Mary Jane, guessing exactly right,

“ ’cause I know I must have seen her—she was just big enough to be a rabbit.”

“I ’spect she was bringing them supper,” said Peggy.

“And we’ve scared her away!” ’exclaimed Mary Jane, sadly. “Oh, let’s get ’em something to eat till she comes back. What do they eat, though?”

“Lettuce,” said Alice.

“Carrots,” said Peggy, and the girls dashed off to the garden.

Peggy started to pull up anything she saw that might tempt a rabbit; but Alice, perhaps because she had done a good deal of the hard work of garden-making, was more considerate.

“There’s no need to pull up so much,” she explained to the two little girls. “The rabbits will like it just as well if we pull carefully. Let’s take these carrots where they are growing a little too thickly. Then the rabbits will get them just the same, but the garden won’t be spoiled.”

That was such good advice that Peggy and Mary Jane were glad to follow it, and they picked and pulled more carefully till each girl had a handful of food to tempt the rabbit visitors.

But do you know, though the girls generously piled lettuce and carrots in front of those baby rabbits, not a nibble would they eat. So the girls finally went away in hopes the mother would come back and tend her babies.

They watched as they went on with their daisy game, but they didn't see a sign of mother rabbit coming back. Had they frightened her too much?



## A GARDEN DISCOVERY

THE very first minute she waked up the next morning, Mary Jane remembered those rabbits.

“I wonder if they’re still there?” she asked Alice. “And do you ’spose they ate what we left for them? Maybe when we got away, the mother came back and fed it to them.”

She hurried through her breakfast, and then she and Alice crept softly up to the old tiling and looked into the rabbit nest. The mother wasn’t there.

“I ’spect she’s gone to get more food,” said Mary Jane. “And, look, Alice, they *did* eat our things! Truly they did! And they must have liked ’em ’cause they’re all gone—every leaf!

Alice looked to make sure. Yes, the pile of fresh lettuce and carrots had disappeared. If

the girls could have seen that surprised little rabbit mother when she came home and found all those good things right by her babies, they would have been delighted. There had been enough not only for the rabbit babies but for the mother too.

“We must give them a lot more to-day,” said Mary Jane, hospitably, as she hunted around the house a few minutes later for a drinking dish, to keep in front of the nest.

“Whom did you think this garden of ours was planned for?” asked Mrs. Merrill laughing at her enthusiasm. “Don’t you think we like carrots and lettuce, too?”

“Well, we might as well have the fun of giving it to them,” remarked Alice, “ ’cause they’ll help themselves anyway. Don’t you know, Daddah said that this morning when he was walking around the garden to see that everything was all right, he noticed that many of the beet and carrot tops were eaten right

off at the ground. The rabbits do that, he said."

"Yes, they do," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "that's the trouble with having them around. They will steal from the garden. And the squirrels will too as soon as the corn is ripe."

"But who cares?" asked Alice. "We can plant more stuff next year, so there will be plenty for them. And they were here before we were anyway."

"May we use this, mother?" asked Mary Jane, who by this time had discovered a flat baking-dish a little marred on one side. "It's just right size."

Permission given, the girls filled the dish and hurried out to place it in front of the rabbit nest.

Peggy came down very soon, and the three girls—for Alice was as much interested in the new pets as the younger girls were—worked diligently doing the things they thought would help the rabbit mother. They cleared out

rubbish; they cut down tall grass and they gathered food.

But somehow or other, what they did failed to please Mrs. Rabbit. For when they came back after lunch to see if by chance there was anything else they could think up to do for her, she was gone, babies and all—not a sign of a rabbit was to be seen.

The girls were much distressed. Here, just when they thought they had interesting pets for the whole summer—off they were gone, nobody knew where. All afternoon the girls mourned their lost pets, and were not even much interested in playing with the daisy chains that Alice had so carefully kept for them in a bucket of water.

“But you should have known better,” said Mr. Merrill when they appealed to him for sympathy that evening. “The rabbit mother didn’t understand help—she *did* understand shelter. You cut down the grass and cleared out the rubbish, and she didn’t feel safe any

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more. Suppose a strange dog had come snooping around the nest after you had taken all that grass down? Where could she hide?"

"Next time we have some rabbits," announced Mary Jane, wisely, "we'll let 'em hide all they like, and then maybe they'll stay."

The days went rapidly and happily by. Mary Jane and Peggy growing to be closer friends all the time—they liked to do the same sort of things. They played in the tree house, they repaired the dam that was always having need of some attention, and they roller skated on the cement sidewalks along the village streets. Mary Jane didn't have any skates of her own, but that didn't matter, for Peggy let her wear one of her pair. Peggy would put on one and Mary Jane the other. Then, holding hands so as to keep even, they would skate along as fine as you please, pushing themselves with the skateless foot and going at an astonishing rate of speed.

But there came a day when a lonesome Mary

Jane waved good-by to her friend. Peggy was going to visit her Grandma way off, seven hours ride on a train.

"I don't see how I'm going to get along without Peggy," said Mary Jane sadly, when she got back home from the station.

"Fiddle sticks!" laughed Mrs. Merrill. "Why, Mary Jane Merrill, I'm surprised at you! You'll get along just as well as before you knew Peggy, only maybe a *little* better, because you'll know you have a very good friend coming back to play with you one of these days. "Now I'll tell you what to do," she continued. "A little girl who likes wax beans as well as you do" (they were Mary Jane's favorite vegetable) "ought to help pick them. There's a fine lot ready in the garden now. You take this basket and pick till it's full. Be careful to pick gently, dear, so as not to loosen the roots and spoil the beans that aren't ripe yet. And after a while, I'll come out and see how you're getting along."

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Mary Jane swung the basket on her arm and wandered out into the garden. She soon forgot all about being lonesome, for there was so much to see and to wonder about—the cobwebs on the lima beans—they stretched here and there and gleamed like threads of fairy silver in the sunshine—the curious fat green worm that perched on the top of the biggest cabbage plant—the white butterflies fluttering around so gaily. Mary Jane loved to watch the garden.

But she must remember the beans that were to be picked. She swung her basket on her left arm, reached under with her right hand and picked one, two, three, four, five, nine—beans and dropped them into her basket. But that wasn't a very good way. The basket kept falling down and hitting the vines, while with only one hand free for working, Mary Jane couldn't pick without pulling, and her mother had said not to do that.



She tried setting the basket on the ground and picking with both hands. That was much better; two hands free for picking made the work go faster, no doubt of that. But bending over picking is tiresome work as anyone who has done it for long knows, and it wasn't long till Mary Jane had little prickles down her back.

"I know what I'm going to do," she said to herself. "I've my oldest bloomers on and the ground is dry. I'm going to sit right down by the beans. That'll be easy as pie!" So she moved the basket within easy reach and sat down in the path between the beans. That was fun. She could stop and rest a minute. She could look over and watch the butterflies on the cabbage, or the bees who were always humming around the great yellow blooms on the squash vine. She felt so comfortable she *nearly* forgot to pick beans—not entirely, but *nearly*.

"Now then," she told herself solemnly, after

several minutes of day dreaming," I must work."

She reached out under the leaves of the vines in the next row—and touched something soft and live!

"Ouch!" she exclaimed, as she pulled her hand back a good deal quicker than she had put it out. "Who are you?"

She gently pushed away the big leaves and looked, and what do you suppose she saw there? A great, sleepy, fat—toad!—blinking in the sunshine that covered him when she pulled back the leaves that were his sunshade.

Now if Mary Jane had been a really truly little city girl, just in the country for the first time in her life, no doubt she would have jumped up and run screaming into the shack. But she had lived in a place where folks had gardens long before she lived in the big city, and she knew perfectly well about toads. She knew that they were very friendly creatures who work hard to help gardeners. That they

worked by eating bugs that would otherwise destroy crops, and that they never in the world would hurt a little girl.

So instead of running frightened into the shack, she just sat there and watched that toad. Two mosquitoes were hovering near. In fact, Mary Jane had had two or three fights with them to keep them away from her bare legs. Nearer and nearer the toad those two mosquitoes flew—of course they didn't notice him a bit, that was part of the game. That's the reason a toad is made green and brown like the things in the garden and very lazy looking, so no creature will suspect him of doing anything quickly. Nearer—and then Mr. Toad's jaws snapped. There was a flash of his red tongue—the mosquitoes were gone. Just that quickly had he gobbled them up!

"Much obliged," said Mary Jane, politely. "That's just what I wanted you to do! I hope you eat all the skeeters in the garden, I do!" And though the toad couldn't answer, not be-

ing given to talking English, Mary Jane was pretty certain he'd eat as many as came his way.

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane!" It was her mother's voice calling from the shack.

"Coming!" replied the little girl. With a hasty look to see if she had anywhere near enough beans—yes, she really had about enough for a meal—Mary Jane jumped up and ran into the house.

"Slip on your cleanest dress," began Mrs. Merrill, and then she looked! "Why Mary Jane! You're all dirt! Well, never mind. You can jump into the shower, wash as quickly and as well as you can, then slip on your dress. Alice will lay it out for you, and you may go into the village with us. We've just had word that Uncle Hal is coming for dinner, and we're going marketing and then to meet him. Hurry now, dear!"

Mary Jane needed no urging. She put the beans in the kitchen; she slipped out of her

soiled clothing, took a hasty shower bath; rubbed dry and glowing, and then slipped into her clean clothes. With socks and sandals and bloomers and slipover dresses it takes very little time to dress if a person wants to hurry. So in just fifteen minutes from the time she was watching the toad, she and her mother and sister were starting to the village for marketing and meeting company, and maybe—who knows?—perhaps an ice cream cone.

## BRIDGE BUILDING

**B**Y THE time the shopping was finished and the mail called for at the Post Office, Uncle Hal's train was whistling for the station so there was no time to even *think* of ice cream cones—Mary Jane barely reached the station by running her hardest.

“Well, young lady!” he greeted her, “you look glad to see me, only hot. What did you run so for? I'll keep! Is there any place in this village where they have ice cream sodas so we could sit down and cool off?”

“Oh, Uncle Hal, really!” cried Alice and Mary Jane was just too pleased to speak.

“Of course there's a place,” Alice continued, “a lovely place with tables and creton-covered chairs and everything, only we haven't been there yet. I guess we spent all our money on the shack,” she added but, “anyway, it's an awfully good shack.”

"But as I didn't spend my money on it, and I'm going to see it just the same, you won't mind eating some of my ice cream?" said Uncle Hal.

"Mind!" exclaimed Mary Jane feelingly. "And may I have a double chocolate soda—Peggy says they're wonderful."

"I don't know Peggy," replied Hal, "but it does sound wonderful, and you may have two if you can eat that many. Are we all having the same?"

They were, and the double chocolates proved as good as they sounded, though Mary Jane, to her great disappointment, simply couldn't eat two! It seemed such a dreadful waste when they were offered.

"Never mind," her uncle comforted her, "next time you get hungry, you and I'll come down and get the other one—you'll have it yet, don't you worry. Now where's the jitney you were telling me about?"

It was great fun to drive out with Uncle



Hal; to show him the woods and the shack, the flowers and the garden and everything. He liked it just as the girls had hoped he would, and insisted he would stay till they turned him off.

"Now have we seen everything?" he asked as they wandered home from displaying the neighbor's chickens and geese and the Mer-rills' very own tomatoes, which were nearly ripe enough to eat.

"Oh, you haven't seen the dam yet," exclaimed Mary Jane suddenly remembering. "It's a dam Peggy and I made all by ourselves, and then Alice helped us mend when Shep stepped on it."

"Sounds like a wonderful dam," laughed Uncle Hal. "Where do you keep it?"

"In the creek," replied Mary Jane, grabbing his hand. "Come on and I'll show you."

There hadn't been any hard storm since the driving rain that flooded the garden, but there had been several soft rains, so the creek had

not run entirely dry. There was a cheerful little trickle of water down over the pebbles and quite a little pool of clear water backed up by the dam. When there was no strong current the mud had time to settle, and the water was clear as a creek ought to be to look pretty.

“You really have a dam, haven’t you?” said he, admiringly, “I call that good work. With such a large-sized river you really need a bridge.”

“Oh, will you build us one!” exclaimed Mary Jane eagerly. “I know you’re just joking, but wouldn’t it be fun?”

Before he answered, Hal walked up and down the side of the creek, estimating distance, and figuring it out as grown folks do.

“I wouldn’t think of trying it by myself,” he finally said, “but if you two people will agree to help——”

“You couldn’t keep me from helping,” cried Alice eagerly. “I just love to make big things.”

“Let’s make it have a railing all along one side like the bridge at Concord,” said Mary Jane, “and we’ll call it the Concord Bridge-in-the-woods.”

“There’s history up to date for you,” laughed their Uncle. “Now you young ladies just wait till I get off these city clothes and into some working togs. I brought some with me in hopes we could get into some mischief of this sort. Then we’ll see what boards or planks we can find around, and go to work.”

Half-an-hour later the job began. Hal found two long planks under the house. Of course the carpenters were not so careless as to leave boards of that value, but Mr. Merrill had ordered these left for use in making heavy shutters for the porch. And there were some lighter boards too, saved for the same purpose.

“We’ll take these because we want them now,” Hal explained to his sister, “and the next time I go into the village I’ll order duplicates for the old porch.”

“New porch you mean,” laughed Mrs. Merrill, “that’s all right anyway. A bridge to-day is a lot more important than shutters in September, so take all you want and replace the boards later.”

Hal managed the heavy boards that were the main part of the bridge. He laid them across from side to side of the creek—the boards were twelve feet long—just right for the creek at the place the bridge was to be. The ends were buried in the ground and were well braced, so that there would be no danger of slipping or a washout.

“Now then,” said he when that part was finished, “trimming comes next.”

“But, Uncle Hal,” objected Mary Jane, “the two boards wiggle and they don’t wiggle together.”

“How did you guess it?” said Uncle Hal. “That’s exactly what they do. Guess we’ll put a floor of lighter boards on them—what do you think of that?”

"Fine!" exclaimed Alice, "and maybe you'll let me nail."

"You shall nail all you like, and so shall Mary Jane," Hal replied. "I'll saw the boards into lengths and start them, then I'll make the railing while you girls nail."

Such fun! The girls never once guessed how exciting carpenter work could be. They decided to make something all the time—something big like a summer-house or garden arbor or the like. But the bridge was to be finished first, and there wasn't much time for talking or planning the next job, as it was serious business.

Finally, just as Mrs. Merrill was calling them that it was time to go and meet Mr. Merrill (the girls went to meet him every evening) the bridge was finished. The floor was laid smooth and straight, holding the two main planks firmly together; the railing of rough, bark-covered branches was very artistic and strong as well. Mary Jane tested it by leaning

hard against it, while Uncle Hal was standing near to catch her if it should give way.

“I call that pretty nice,” approved Mr. Merrill, when he inspected the work a few minutes later. “You people must be good carpenters. Sorry I hired somebody else to build the shack. Now what will you make next?”

“Whatever the girls say,” replied Hal, “what do you want, Alice?”

Alice thought a minute. “Ever since I read Swiss Family Robinson I’ve wanted a house up in a tree,” she said.

“But we have a tree house,” said Mary Jane, thinking of the house she fell into in the woods, where she and Peggy had such good times.

“Oh, it wouldn’t be that kind of a tree house,” explained Alice. “I mean up in a tree. Where you climb up the tree to get into the house.”

“Really, Alice?” exclaimed Mary Jane, in round-eyed amazement. “Wouldn’t that be

fun? Oh, Uncle Hal, make us one right away!"

"No sir! Not before to-morrow," said Hal, "I'm starved now."

"Dinner's ready!" Mrs. Merrill called from the porch at exactly that opportune minute, "and don't be slow, for we have new potatoes baked and you mustn't let them spoil."

But immediately after dinner, plans for the tree house were continued. Hal and Alice picked out the tree it was to be in—a beautiful maple about fifty feet back from the house, and Hal planned just how it was to be built.

There was no sleeping late for the girls the next morning. They were up betimes, and their morning work all finished before Uncle Hal even stirred.

"I wouldn't like to call him," said Mary Jane, as loudly as she dared, "but couldn't I just ask him if he's really asleep?"

"You might try," Uncle Hal answered her from upstairs, "when's breakfast?"



"Ours is all finished long ago," Alice replied. "And yours is ready whenever you are."

"Alice has made some muffins for you, she's 'fraid they'll get too done," said Mary Jane.

"Mary Jane's made your coffee," added Alice, "it's the first she ever made. She's learning to cook a lot too."

"I'll be eating in seven minutes," declared Hal, "I certainly am getting service out here."

The girls heard him jump out of bed, turn on the shower, and then in exactly seven minutes he appeared for his breakfast.

The tree house was every bit as much fun to build as the bridge, perhaps even more exciting, for it was lots of fun to climb up and down and hand nails and hammers and things. Hal nailed some boards across the tree trunk so a person could climb right up, easily, like climbing a ladder. Even Mary Jane could go as easily and safely as you please.

“Won’t Peggy be surprised!” Mary Jane kept saying, “she’ll be just that surprised she won’t hardly know its my house!”

Finally, long after lunch, the tree house was all finished. There was a platform fitted up where the first strong branches begin. Around the platform was a railing so no one could fall off and get hurt. Then—and this took the most time of all—along two sides were seats so that the girls wouldn’t have to bother with carrying chairs. Of course they might want to take cushions, but cushions are easy to carry, or they might even just be tossed up. Under the seat at one side was a shelf for keeping books or dishes or doll’s things—Oh, it really was a perfect little tree house!

“There!” said Hal proudly, as he surveyed the work and decided there was nothing else to be done, “that’s not so bad for one day’s work.”

“Now what’ll we make next?” asked Mary

Jane, who, now that this interesting carpenter work had started, wanted it to continue.

“We’re not going to make anything more to-day,” replied Uncle Hai positively. “But to-morrow we’re going to make a Flying Dutchman.”

“What’s that?” asked both girls.

“Well, if you don’t know, you’ll just have to wait and see,” said Hal.

“Can’t we guess and then you tell us?” asked Mary Jane.

“Well—” said Uncle Hal doubtfully, “no-o. But I’ll tell you this much. It goes around; it goes up and down; it makes you squeal; it’s crosswise and up and down; it has two parts, and you ride it.”

“Goodness!” exclaimed Alice, “nothing could be *all* that, Uncle Hal.”

“But a Flying Dutchman is every bit of that,” replied he laughing. “And not another thing will I say.”

So with that they had to be content. They

guessed and guessed and dreamed about it, but not till the next day, when Uncle Hal showed it to them, did they have the faintest idea what a Flying Dutchman really was.

## THE LAST DAYS OF SUMMER

MARY JANE was up early the next morning, her share of work all done so she could go into the village with Uncle Hal when he went to buy material for the Flying Dutchman. They went to the hardware store first, where Hal bought some screw things, and then to the lumber yard where Hal picked out a very long, strong board about a foot wide, and a cedar post. He had a hole bored into the center of the board.

“Now then, we’re in a hurry to get these things,” he said to the merchant, “could you deliver them this morning?”

“We’re going right out that way,” said the man, “and we’ll have them there before you get home.” He was right for, of course, Mary Jane had to stop and get the double chocolate that she couldn’t eat the other time, and by

the time they got home their purchases were there in the yard, with Alice standing looking at them and wondering what in the world they would make.

In less than an hour the Flying Dutchman was finished.

“Why it’s really a Merry-go-round!” exclaimed Mary Jane. “What fun to have a Merry-go-round in our own back yard! May we ride it now?”

Hal had dug a hole and planted the cedar post firmly. Then he put the strong screw in the top and set the long board in the post, the hole in the board just fitting the screw. He held the board while Alice climbed on one end, then he set Mary Jane on the other, and gave the thing a toss so that they went whirling around.

Such squealing and shouting as there was! For while it was loads of fun, it was also awfully “scarey” to spin round and round on a board that waved up and down as it swung.

“It really is what you said,” Alice admitted when at last she climbed off, “it goes around and up and down; and it surely made us squeal!”

“I wish Peggy was here to ride!” cried Mary Jane, “ ’cause I’d just like to see how scared she’d be when it begins going up and down. It’s a teeter-totter-merry-go-round and that’s the most fun of all.”

Uncle Hal stayed three whole days, and while he didn’t build so much more, he took the girls for walks in the woods, taught them a lot about squirrels and birds, went on a picnic, and had a wonderfully good time.

“I wish Peggy would come home,” sighed Mary Jane a few days after Hal left, “she just never comes home!”

“Suppose you go into the village for mail this morning, instead of waiting till afternoon,” suggested Mrs. Merrill. “Maybe there’ll be a letter from Peggy or her mother.”

And sure enough there was. Mary Jane



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hurried all the way home, because she just thought maybe the letter had something to say about Peggy, but she didn't even guess how good the news would be—Peggy was to be home Saturday at two o'clock.

“May I go in to the village to meet her, and may we have her come right here to play?” she asked.

“To be sure,” answered Mrs. Merrill, just as Mary Jane had known she would, “and we'll have little cakes that Alice can make, and I'll make peach ice cream, and we'll have a regular party.”

But when Saturday afternoon came it was much too hot for any ordinary fun. By the time Mary Jane had walked in to the village to meet her friend, had ridden out with them in the jitney, and had helped Peggy unpack, both girls were tired and hot.

“You just come on over to my house,” insisted Mary Jane, “and we'll eat ice cream. It isn't too hot to eat ice cream, Peggy.”

"Ice cream's not ready for an hour," announced Mrs. Merrill, when the girls told her they were ready to eat.

"Oh, dear, what'll we do!" sighed Mary Jane.

"How about a shower bath in the garden?" asked Mr. Merrill, who had come home while Mary Jane was at Peggy's.

"You have to take a shower bath in the bath room, Daddah," said Mary Jane, "I wish I could take another one too," she added, "'cause it's the coolest thing there is to do."

"Right you are, and you shall take one that will last till the ice cream is ready," said Mr. Merrill. "Get some old bathing suits on—Peggy doesn't need to go home for hers, she may wear that extra one we brought out. Then come on into the garden and I'll show you what I mean."

Much mystified, the three girls went up to the sleeping porch and dressed in bathing suits—old canvass sandals and all—and then

hurried down to the garden, where they found Mr. Merrill. All the time they were dressing they were wondering and guessing what the surprise might be. It had been something of a disappointment that the little lake had been too low this dry summer to make swimming in it safe for health, so the girls had missed the fun of playing in the water. Next summer, the village committee assured them, the dam would be made better and there would surely be swimming. There hadn't even been a hose, for the Merrills couldn't get everything at once, though Mr. Merrill had said many a time that he thought water in the garden was a real necessity.

"He got it! He got it!" shouted Mary Jane, as she ran ahead of the others and saw her father working in the garden. Yes, the hose was there long and shining, with a bright new nozzle.

"Hold your horses there a minute," laughed her father as she picked up the hose ready to



The three girls played in the cool water spray.



spray the geraniums, "I have it just about ready! You were a minute too soon for me. Wait till I get this attached so. Now! Hold it tight while I turn it on."

Mary Jane held it tightly and the water came squirting, sputtering out onto the flowers.

"Now then," said her father, "I'll turn it off and show you something else."

The something else proved to be a garden spray that could be set down in the ground and from which the water fell as from a shower.

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "we're to play in that! Oh, goody! Come on girls!"

The others needed no urging, and for over an hour the three girls played in and out the cool water spray. The sun was hot enough so that there was no danger of chilling, and it was great fun to dash in and out the cool wetness and to play tag right through the water. Then came ice cream eaten in the shade on the

hillside, and an hour's quiet play on the grass before Peggy had to go home to dress for her dinner.

"I'm going to take my shower down here every day," said Peggy as she went up the path toward home.

"And so'll I," agreed Mary Jane, "we'll take 'em together."

After that hot August day when Peggy came home and they had such fun with the shower, the summer seemed to fly by on wings. The chirp of the locusts announced that frost wasn't far away and so, though a person couldn't even *think* of winter those lovely hot days, still the girls lost no chance for play. On the Flying Dutchman, up in the tree house, down by the dam and bridge, out in the woods playing house, taking walks, doing errands to the village, the days simply were not long enough for all the jolly things they knew to do.

And each day the sun set a little earlier, and



each morning Mary Jane could see the squirrels dashing around hunting early falling acorns or nuts with which to begin filling their pantries for winter.

Every Saturday Mr. Merrill worked on the shutters that were to close up the big front porch and protect it from the winter storms. Alice helped him nail and saw, and Mary Jane, covered with her oldest apron dress, helped paint. It was great fun to dabble the brush into the the can of dark brown stain, and then paint the boards to match the house. She liked it even better than playing—it seemed awfully grown up to paint; especially when Peggy came down and looked on enviously and admiringly.

Then one day, when Mary Jane went in to the village for the mail, she brought out a notice from her school—a notice that said just what day the school would open, and that every girl and boy must be there the opening day.

"But we can't go till the frost comes and makes the leaves red," exclaimed Alice, in disappointment.

"No, but you wouldn't want to miss school," Mrs. Merrill reminded them. "I'll tell you what we can do. School opens Tuesday, so we won't have to go in till Monday evening. Suppose we have a picnic Monday morning, and have all the girls and boys of the neighborhood here. You and Mary Jane may cook anything you like and have as many folks as you want. It will be a big celebration for the end of the summer."

"Ice cream and everything?" asked Mary Jane.

"Dear me, yes," laughed Mrs. Merrill. "It wouldn't be a celebration without ice cream. And as for seeing the red leaves, Alice dear,"<sup>1</sup> she added, "I don't see why we can't come out here some Saturday and Sunday in October and have a beautiful time seeing the woods, gathering nuts, and doing the final shutting

up of the house. So don't feel too bad about leaving the woods, girlyies. This is home, and we'll come out here whenever we like."

With that happy thought the girls set to work planning the picnic. All the neighbor girls and boys were invited, so that made nine counting Mary Jane and Alice. Nine folks to make sandwiches and salad and cake for! No wonder the Merrills were busy! The girls had learned much about cooking during the summer, so they wanted to do as much as possible by themselves. Alice made cake and brown bread; Mary Jane made salad dressing and cooked and peeled the potatoes and carrots for vegetable salad, which was pretty good for folks their age—no doubt of that.

The morning dawned clear and bright and just hurried by—there was so much to do! By eleven o'clock, the time set for the picnic, every girl and boy was on hand, and they all played games and had a good time out in the yard till dinner time, promptly at twelve.

And if the Flying Dutchman was the most popular amusement, that's no wonder! It's such fun!

The dinner was delicious and every scrap was eaten up, which saved Mrs. Merrill the bother of wondering what to do with left-over food.

Finally, at four, Mrs. Merrill had to call the girls to come in and dress for the train; it was time to go back to the city. While the girls bathed and dressed as quickly as they could, Mr. Merrill locked up the shack and Mrs. Merrill made sure that everything was packed and ready in time for the truck that was to come for their trunks.

A few minutes before five the truck arrived, and when Sam, the driver, saw how reluctant the children were to have even the Merrill's baggage leave, he had a happy thought.

"All you children, you," he said waving his hand at the crowd, "hop up here on the truck. Mary Jane, you'n Alice got your best

clothes on, you sit in the seat with me and you rest, you get in with the trunks. And you can all drive down to the train."

Such fun! Of course they did as Sam suggested, and it was a shouting, laughing crowd of girls and boys who drove through the village to the little station. Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, arriving at the station in the jitney a few minutes later, were glad to see their girls so gay, and to know that they could be with their summer friends up to the last minute.

The train soon steamed in, the Merrills hurried aboard and then stopped on the platform to wave goodbye to their friends till the train rolled out of sight around the curve.

For some time Mary Jane looked silently out of the window. They passed the woods she had learned to love; passed fields and country, and dashed cityward as fast as the great engine could carry them.

"I 'spect I'll be in school to-morrow," she

finally said. "School will seem queer after all the fun we've had this summer."

"School will seem pretty nice, once you get started," said Mrs. Merrill, as she looked at the sturdy, tanned little girl by her side. "Anybody as husky as you are ought to have a good time all winter."

"And Betty'll be home," said Mary Jane, beginning to think of the fun to come, "and we'll go together to-morrow and maybe we'll sit near together, maybe we will." And she began planning to herself all the things she had to tell Betty, and all the good times they would have together.

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